

# THE GREEN CURTAIN



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## THE GREEN CURTAIN



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# THE GREEN CURTAIN

BY  
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by E. B. BROWNE



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## CHAPTER I

IT was summer when first Godwin knew that he was alive, summer and the world was more than a hundred years younger than it is to-day : but in that Forest where Godwin opened his eyes and began to wonder about the world, those years have made less difference than in the places where man's work has prevailed. Here God and nature were paramount, and the world where Godwin awoke was lovely. He was lying on his back on the mossy ground, with Nick the terrier nestling against him, warm and panting. Nick and he had grown up together for three years, but whereas Nick the puppy had attained to mature doghood, full of knowledge and artfulness, Godwin was still a little child, only just beginning to feel that he was alive.

As he lay and gazed, basking in the light and warmth, he found himself in a circle of great beech trees, whose leaves were still so young that the sunshine filtered through them and made a green light in the long vistas stretching far away through avenues of silvery trunks. It was in the shadow of these great beeches that the gipsies had their little colony of tents—so brown and so low that they were hardly seen by a wanderer in the woods till he came close upon them. High up above the tops of the trees, as far as Godwin's eyes could reach, there was a roof of consummate blue, the blue of a June sky ; and all over the grass that stretched around him there were purple orchises and lady's slipper, and all the flowers that carpet the woods in June. It was a lovely world in which to awaken from the unconscious existence of babyhood. Years after he was able to remember that day as the beginning of his life ; and from that day things began to happen, and stamp themselves upon his memory. Before then he had been little more than an animal, a creature that



opened its mouth to be fed, and shut its eyes to sleep, and knew no difference between sleeping and waking—but from this day he was conscious, and began to call himself “me.”

He was a happy child, for though he lived among a good many people whose ways were of the roughest, nobody had ever been unkind to him. There could hardly have been a happier child in England than Godwin, as the winters and summers of his life went by, from that June morning to his seventh birthday, though he had never worn shoe-leather, and his little frock was not weather-proof, and for playthings he had only the things he found for himself—flowers and pebbles and sticks, and the rose-coloured toad-stools that clustered at the roots of the beeches when the days began to be cold, and when his frock seemed to have grown suddenly thin. There were plenty of things to play with, and for playfellows he had ever so many little tawny-skinned boys and girls who slept under the brown tents and ran about all day, idle and happy. They were never unkind to him, even when they were twice as big as he. Indeed, they knew better than to say a rough word or lay a rough hand upon Sally Merritt's boy; for everybody in the little community knew that Sally Merritt was not to be trifled with where this boy was concerned. The children were gipsy children; but Mrs. Merritt and her boy were not gipsies, though she had in a manner cast in her lot with these dark-faced gentry. There was very little of the Romany about Sarah, except just that streak of the blood, that narrow streak from a great-grandfather whose name was Lee—just that one ancestor of the royal race, whose blood made her acceptable to the forest wanderers. She was British in all her notions and proclivities, and though she had gone about with the band since her baby was six months' old she did not understand the gipsy patter or the gipsy superstitions. She went about with them because she loved the open-air life, and wanted their companionship for her protection. She had chosen to go with the Travellers, or dwellers in tents, rather than with the van gipsies, although they were richer, and although she had her own van, furnished with brooms and brushes and other useful goods, that she was able to sell in the Forest hamlets, by which she contrived to scrape a living, and to hold her own beside the camp fires.

She had appeared among them suddenly one day with a baby and a bundle, had told them that she wanted to cast her lot among them, and that her grandmother's father was one Ephraim Lee, hanged for smuggling when George the Second was King.

It was by the gipsies' advice that she had bought the little one-horse van and her small stock of marketable goods. She had told them that she was a widow, without any near relations, and that this boy-baby was all she had in the world to live for, and that she had made up her mind to live in those old woods, a wanderer among wanderers. She had been born and reared by Southampton Water, had known and loved the Forest in her childhood, and had never seen London till she married and went there with her husband. She had lived in a London street and hated it; and it was there that her baby was born and her husband died, events that happened within a few weeks. And then, she told them, being her own mistress, and having a little bit of money to invest, she made up her mind to get her living under God's blue sky, not under that murky canopy of smoke and in those narrow streets, where she had never felt as if she could breathe freely.

"My boy shall grow up in the woods, till it is time for him to go to school," she said, at which the gipsy children's eyes grew wide with terror; for the name of school was appalling to them, especially since parsons and other kind people had occasionally come among these wanderers and told them what a dreadful thing it was for their children to grow up in this joyous freedom, without learning to read and write, without church on Sundays, and without the love and fear of God on all days of the week.

"My boy wouldn't have lived a year if I had kept him in London," Mrs. Merritt told her gipsy friends. "He was a poor little creature, born before his time, and it was all I could do to keep him alive for the first six months; but the sicklier he was, and the oftener I thought he was slipping through my fingers, the fonder I got of him, which I suppose is the way of mothers; and one day it was borne in upon me that he might grow strong and hearty under God's sky. I remembered the foals in the Forest, and how they lived and thrived in good and bad weather, and with very little food; and I made up my mind that the Forest should be his nursery; and having no kith or kin, there was nothing to keep me in the narrow streets under the dull grey sky, so here I am, and here I shall stay, moving about the wood, just as you gipsies do, till it's time for Godwin to go to school; for I mean him to be a scholar, as his father was before him."

His father? It was not often she mentioned Godwin's father; but those tawny companions were not inquisitive, except about



her little bit of money and what she was going to do with it. She had to pay her footing among them ; but once paid they were honest with her, and gave her all the privileges of their protection and society, without sponging on her small means. She was shrewd and industrious, and she did well with her homely wares in the Forest villages, Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst, Cadnam and Burley. Her customers liked her, and if they only bought a scrubbing-brush or a sixpenny basket, they would beg her to come again. She was not handsome ; her course through life had not been handicapped by the fatal gift of beauty. Her features were of a fine manly stamp, denoting energy and strong will. Her complexion had been early spoiled by smallpox. Her figure was neat and shapely, and she was active, and walked as if she had been taught by a drill-serjeant. And she had a smile that was like sunshine, or at least Godwin thought so ; a smile that welcomed his waking, and comforted him as he fell asleep.

To live in those exquisite woods, and to have nothing to do but ramble about, sometimes with other boys and a ragged girl or two, sometimes with no companion but his dog, might be enough happiness for any boy in Christendom. Princes' children know not half such bliss. It was enough for Godwin. It was a life of unbroken joy, a life that knew no changes but the changing seasons, and in which there were very few days to be remembered in the years that came after.

One such day there was, not long after his seventh birthday, a day upon which something happened—something trivial enough in itself perhaps, but which made an event in that simple life under green boughs.

It was an April morning—early in that sweet spring month—and the oaks were only just beginning to open amber leaf-buds in the sunshine, and there was only a beech here and there that had clothed its sunward boughs in shimmering green. Godwin knew where to look for those first beech leaves, for the beeches in Mark Ash and Queen's Bower were familiar friends, and he knew their times and seasons. He was squatting at his mother's feet as she sat under a hawthorn weaving a mat with rushes from the Redbridge River, when a cavalcade of horsemen came plunging through the stream, and splashing over the gorse and heather, and among them a beautiful lady.

A beautiful lady on an up-standing grey horse, a lady in a blue habit, that swept the water as she galloped through the shallow pools. Half a dozen gipsies were standing about, idle, in the



sunshine, and there were two of their low, brown tents a little way off, and the smoke of one of their wood fires.

"Had the hounds come this way?" one of the gentlemen asked a gipsy who was lounging against a tree.

"No," the man told him. "The hounds were in full cry in Mark Ash half an hour ago. They'd be miles away over Ringwood plain, most likely, by now."

The horseman swore a good round oath in a gentleman-like style, the true Corinthian. He was young and good-looking, and those keen eyes of the little group of idlers noted the diamond that flashed among the cambric folds of his voluminous stock, and the gold handle of his hunting-whip.

The lady rode through the stream that ran between her and the spot where Sally Merritt was sitting under the May bush. She bent over to speak to her, and it seemed as if they were old acquaintances, and Godwin saw the beautiful lady turn and look at him with a little start of surprise, and keep her bright blue eyes fixed upon him curiously while she bent low to talk to his mother, who stood by the grey's handsome head. The strange lady had golden hair, and a pink-and-white complexion, and was so different from the dark gipsy faces he knew that the boy stood and gazed at her in blank wonder.

"Lift him up to me," she commanded, with authority, when she and Sarah had whispered together for some minutes, while the three hunters fidgeted, a little way off, and their riders looked on impatiently. They had given up the hounds for a bad job; and, after all, they were out rather to please the lady than for sport.

Sally took hold of the boy in her strong arms and lifted him in front of the lady's saddle.

"What a strange, beautiful boy!" said the young man with the diamond breast-pin, riding close up to the grey horse.

Strange! Yes, that was what was always to be said about Godwin. He would not have been half so beautiful if he had been quite like other people. He was dark, but not of the gipsy darkness—brown or tawny. His was a dark pallor, like century-old marble. His violet-grey eyes were like stars; his thin, aquiline nose was patrician; and his black hair fell loose over his slender neck, in which the muscles looked hard as iron. He was very thin, a mere wisp of humanity, but a man in miniature; and his great eyes looked up at the pink-and-white lady in angry wonder as she looked laughingly down at him.

"Isn't he beautiful?" she said, turning to her young cavalier,

who was himself a handsome specimen of self-indulgent youth, high-born, rich, and dissolute.

She was holding Godwin on her horse's shoulders. She took his small, dark face between her hands and stared into those wonderful eyes, and examined every line in the strongly marked countenance, the thin cheeks, the resolute mouth and chin. Never had she seen such iron will, except in one other face. A change came into her saucy blue eyes as she looked at him, a cloud of sorrow, and then she squeezed the little mouth against her own and kissed it passionately. He wrenched his face away in a fury.

"Let me down," he said, scowling at her, and he scrambled out of her arms, slipping lightly to the ground, and ran away.

"What an unlicked cub!" cried the horseman.

The other men had come close up, and they were all clustered round the lady, eager to ride off with her, in a forlorn hope of coming upon the hounds. The day was young yet, and in those woods there were all manner of surprises. You might lose sound of the hunt for an hour, and at a turn of the wood come suddenly upon huntsman and pack, and finish well to the front, while the rest of the field were left nowhere. The lady's companions were from the shires, and could not see the charm in Forest hunting.

"Bring that little toad back," said the lady to Sarah. "I want to give him a guinea."

She spoke to the young man on the chestnut, who took a handful of loose gold and silver from his breeches pocket, out of which she picked a couple of guineas.

Sarah stood by, mute and stolid, and made no attempt to pursue Godwin; but the gipsies had caught the magic word guinea, and two of them ran after the boy, the second facing him when he doubled, and brought him back by the scruff of his neck, with the terrier Nick running in front of them, barking furiously.

"Will somebody strangle that cur dog?" cried one of the horsemen who was keener than the others, and had never left off listening for the distant music of hounds in full cry.

The gipsy's brawny arms held the boy up to the lady, as if he had been a puppy, and she put the two bright golden guineas into his sunburnt palm and closed his fingers over them. But Godwin only scowled more fiercely than before, and the shining yellow coins flashed downward into the grass.

"I don't like you, and I don't want your money," said the

boy, as he fought himself free of the gipsy's hold, and ran to his mother.

"Whatever you've done for him, Sally Merritt, you haven't taught him manners," cried the lady, whose pink-and-white beauty had changed to angry red.

"What, do you know the brat's mother?" asked the man on the chestnut as they all rode off.

"Yes. She was in my service a few years ago."

"A sturdy wench," said her friend; "but do you mean to tell me the wild imp with the shining eyes is that woman's offspring?"

"He takes after his father."

"And what was his father? There must have been blue blood somewhere."

"His mother has gipsy blood, and they say that's about the bluest," answered the lady, and nobody thought any more about Godwin.

The gipsy picked both guineas out of the grass, pocketed one with a dexterous movement, and offered the other to Sarah.

"You'd best keep it for your boy. He was a fool to behave so rude to the lady. It isn't everybody would give him gold for love of his handsome face."

"Godwin doesn't want her money. No more do I."

"Oh, if you're so proud, I'll take care of it for him," answered Godwin's Romany uncle, as he pouched the second coin. "He can have it off me when he has more sense, and will know what to do with it."

Godwin thought very little more of the beautiful lady in the daylight; but he sometimes dreamt of her, and his dream was always a bad dream, if she was in it. In summer he slept out of doors in a nest among the bracken, with Nick to guard him from all other living creatures, and his summer dreams were as sweet as his summer sleep; but in colder seasons he slept in the van, very snug and warm, and though he loved his cosy little bed beside Sally's, his winter dreams were sometimes frightening. If the lady appeared to him, she was a cruel person, and he used to awake cold and trembling, he, who was afraid of nothing in the daylight.

It was two years after this April morning, and he was nine years old when his first never-to-be-forgotten sorrow befell him.

There had been three days and nights of rain; and on the fourth morning when the weather changed, and the September sun shone out in all his glory, there were pools of water in the



green hollows near the camp, mirrors that reflected the golden light, and made a splendour among the silvery trunks of the beeches and the dark masses of holly.

It was a morning to fill young hearts with joy, and Godwin called his dog Nick, and went off where Nick led. Indeed, it was the terrier who led the way in most of their roaming; and to-day Nick went leaping over heather and gorse to Queen's Bower and Brockenhurst Bridge, where the Forest river had swollen to a torrent that flooded the high road and ran deep and strong under the bridge. Dog and boy stopped at the edge of the water, and Nick began to bark vociferously, and with boisterous leapings demanded his usual amusement—a stick flung far out into the stream for him to retrieve.

He was a good swimmer and fearless in the water. Godwin found a stick and flung it as far as he could, and Nick leapt eagerly into the rough water, but quick as he was, the stick had been swept a long way in front of him, and he had to swim with all his might to reach it. To reach it, and then to bring it back to his master. That was the game, and Nick was a game dog. He had been swept so far down stream that he was nearly done when he turned to breast the current. He might have swum ashore below bridge, but that was not the game. He must get back to his master, and with a struggle the plucky mongrel faced the stream.

Godwin knew nothing of danger, had no thought that his dog could drown. He watched the brown head, just visible above the turbulent water, coming slowly towards him, till all in a moment it was travelling the other way, growing smaller and smaller, a brown speck in the water, and then gone—gone for ever. Nick, his comrade and playfellow—Nick who had slept against his breast ever since he knew what sleep was—Nick, the dearest thing in his little world, after his mother, was lost for ever. He gave a shrill scream of anguish and jumped into the water, but a strong hand was on the collar of his jacket before he had drifted from the bank, and a strong arm lifted him on to a Forest keeper's shoulder.

"Let me go, let me go!" shrieked the boy. "I want my dog—I want Nick."

"You'll never see your dog again, boy, and you can't swim as well as he did. Come along home to your mother. What would her say if I had to tell she that her little boy was drowned?"

Godwin had sense enough to know that if Nick was precious

to him he was precious to his mother, and he let himself be taken back to the camp on the edge of Rhinefields, sobbing heart-brokenly all the way. All the joy of life was gone for ever. The earth and the sky were black.

"Don't fret your poor little heart out," said the friendly keeper, whose wife was a customer of Sally's, and who knew the little lad that used to sit on the steps of the van. "My terrier is going to have a family, and if you are a good boy and stop crying I'll give you a puppy."

"I don't want a puppy, I want Nick," moaned Godwin, and he sobbed heart-brokenly till the keeper gave him into his mother's arms.

Even her caresses, and love, and pity could not help him. His soul had gone down into an abyss of sorrow. There was no light in the world. For days and nights he fretted and wept for his dog; for years he remembered and grieved, living over again the anguish of those moments when he watched the brown head drifting away, till the waters closed over it. He used to dream that Nick was alive: he used to feel the shaggy form against his breast. It was the contact of his own living arm against his side that made him think the living dog was there. Cruel delusion! not seldom suffered, and always the same false dream and bitter awakening.

He wandered about the familiar paths, lonely and disconsolate, thinking of his dog, seeing him again in his mind's eye. There were the bushes he hunted for badger or squirrel. There was the ditch in which he always suspected rats. Godwin hated the Forest river, by which their walks had gone. "Curse you!" he groaned, with precocious intensity. "Curse every drop of your water, for drowning my dog!"

Never again could he walk beside the river or gather flowers upon the bank. For him it was a river of hell, and when he saw a brave stag standing at bay in the water—surrounded by his murderers—it seemed natural that such slaughter should be done there. It was a river of death.

It was not till many years after that Godwin gave his heart to a dog. He was one of those people who have a morbid passion and aching pity for creatures that go on four legs; and he had to suffer all through his life from that love. Over-worked horses, beasts on their way to the slaughter-house, friendless dogs, and birds cooped in cages, were all things that came between him and the sunshine. Could any one be happy in a world where loving and lovable creatures had to suffer from man's want of love?

## CHAPTER II

SALLY MERRITT was not the kind of mother to let her boy nurse his sorrow without some endeavour to comfort him. She set her wits to work to find out some kind of distraction for him. He had the Forest. He had the sun and the moon and the stars, and the wind on the heath ; all the lovely things that are dear to the gipsy heart : but at every turn in the wood, by every foot-bridge or ford, at every hour of the day, he was reminded of his lost companion, and with the drowning of Nick his childish joy had perished.

She must find something else.

For a beginning she took him about with her in the van, and made believe that he was useful to her, which had a good effect, and stopped his brooding ; and then one day while he was being admired by a little cluster of matrons at the door of a village inn, a new idea occurred to her. One of the women talked to Godwin, and her talk was purely interrogative. " Did he help his mother ? Did he know how to make baskets ? Had he any brothers and sisters ? How old was he ? Could he read ? "

No, Godwin couldn't read.

Nine years old, and not able to read !

" But you know your letters, anyhow ? " said the dame.

Godwin shook his head doubtfully.

The only letters he knew were upon the cards that one of his gipsy uncles used to lay on the ground, for his pony to pick out. The pony would put a hoof upon A, and B, and D, and X, and W, and did not make many mistakes : a wonderful pony, that paid for his oats and hay by such displays of intelligence at village fairs.

" I know the letters Jim knows," Godwin said.

" You ought to larn your boy to read, if you can't send 'un to school," the woman said to Sarah, who answered somewhat haughtily :

" I'm goin' to, come winter. He was rather a sickly child, though he's strong now, and I had to keep books away from him."



Sally was not given to deep thought, but she did a good deal of thinking as she drove home that afternoon, letting Peggy, the piebald mare, choose her own road, safe enough where all roads were travelled so often by that patient beast.

"Books?" Sally had heard of books as a cure for sorrow. She had heard of people who so loved books that they were always happy while they could sit in a corner and read. She remembered a cousin of hers who would scarce speak a word for a whole evening; but would sit with his nose in a volume of stories, or, what he liked better, a book of plays, as happy as a king.

"I must teach you to read this winter, Monkey," she said, as Godwin nestled beside her.

She had all sorts of pet names for him. Mouse, Bird, Monkey, as the fancy took her; but Monkey was the favourite.

"I ain't much of a scholar, but you're a clever little chap, and I think between us we can manage it; and then there's all sorts of stories about fairies and demons, and birds and beasts. Stories that my cousin, Jackie Dawson, loved, and could read when he was not much more than half your age. Ah, he was a rare one for books."

Godwin's education began on the next rainy day, the first day that was too bad for Peggy the mare and the stock of baskets and brooms swinging outside the van. Godwin and his mother sat on the floor with a queer old spelling book between them, and he faced the mystery of the alphabet, and of letters that made poor little meaningless words—Ba, Da, Ma, Bo, Go, Do. It seemed that they had been travelling a long way before they came to Dog and Cat. It was uphill work, for the teacher was slower than the pupil—but was just capable of reading the spelling-book stories aloud, with occasional croppers. Some of the hard words used to make Godwin smile when he met them in after days, remembering Sally's version of them: but he made his first acquaintance with imaginative literature in those old stories of Tommy and Harry, and the three schoolboys, each of whom showed such a different disposition on becoming possessed of a large plum cake. Godwin loved the story of Richard, who was generous, and gave the greater part of his cake to a blind fiddler; but it was not Richard's example that made him so princely a giver in the time to come. Nature had endowed him with that great heart and open hand: just as she had given him genius rare among men.

Sitting in his little rush-bottomed chair close beside his dear

Sally, peering into the book by the light of a tallow candle, Godwin mastered the first of those "three R's" which in that happy time were the beginning and end of a humble education. Before the winter was over he could read better than his teacher, and it was he who read the spelling-book stories aloud to Sarah as she darned his little shirt, or patched his jacket, by that dim light of the single candle in a brass candlestick. Soon came the time when the spelling-book was exhausted, every story having been read over and over again—the fables—the little bits of poetry—and the dreadful fate of the bad boy who was eaten by a lion. When he was tired of the book, Godwin would act that tragedy of the young reprobate's doom, first as the lion, with awful roarings, then as Harry—rolling about on the floor of the van—shrieking in the lion's jaws.

The representation was so thrilling that Sally made her boy go through it on the grass in the midst of the camp one spring evening, to the delight of the gipsy children and the approval of the gipsy uncles and aunts, who applauded him heartily.

"The chap ought to be an actor," one of the women said, and when Godwin went to bed that night Sally had to tell him what an actor was, and what acting was like, and Mrs. Merritt's tongue having once been set going upon an interesting subject, she told Godwin of the great actors she had seen when she lived in London, beginning with Grimaldi, the clown, who by her showing was the greatest of them all. Much finer than Mr. John Kemble, whose acting Sarah had never relished, though she admired her namesake, the tragedian's incomparable sister. Godwin lay awake half the night in his little bed, first listening, and then, when Mrs. Merritt was snoring the snores of the just, thinking of the wonderful clown. For a long time after that Godwin would never go to sleep without being told some story of the great London theatres, Covent Garden and Drury Lane.

And now the spelling-book being known by heart, Godwin pined for another book, and on her next visit to Southampton, to replenish her stock, the kind mother bought him one from the sixpenny box outside a second-hand bookshop Above Bar.

It was a thick little duodecimo, bound in old-fashioned mottled calf; and it was a book of plays—a fact that enraptured Godwin.

There were three tragedies in the volume, by different hands. First "Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage," then "Fatal Curiosity," and last, as if least worthy, "Othello."

That little book was Godwin's companion all through the spring. He wandered about the old woods with it, reading as

he went, and it was a mercy that he did not walk into the Forest river, by whose windings he was once more content to rove. Isabella's woes, and the miserable mother who murdered her unrecognised son, helped him to forget Nick—no, not to forget, but to live through a summer morning without brooding upon thoughts of his lost companion. No book, no pleasure, no dream of the future could make him forget the dog he had loved for the first nine years of his life. Those years of childhood are long years, and the memory of them is ineffaceable.

He read the plays to his mother of an evening, as she laboured over her needlework. She made all her own clothes and her son's, and the task of making and mending was never finished. He read his favourite scenes so often that he soon had them by heart; and then to act them was a natural development. He acted for his mother in the van, and afterwards for that larger audience by the camp fire. He smeared his face with charcoal one evening, and twisted a red cotton handkerchief round his head for a turban, and acted Othello's murder of his wife, with one of the gipsy girls for Desdemona; and the Forest wanderers, who had seen no London actors, never forgot the ten-year-old stripling with the black face and the shining eyes, and the figure—tall for his age—that was all nerve and sinew. Godwin loved to act before his old friends; but when his Uncle Ephraim proposed taking him to the "Crown and Stirrup," the cosy little inn on the Brockenhurst Road, and letting him act one of his scenes in the tap-room, Godwin drew himself up. No, he would never act before strangers till he could stand on the stage of that grand theatre his mother had told him about: the royal play-house, where there were soldiers to guard the doors, and where the Prince went very often.

"And the Princess?" Godwin had asked.

"Yes, the Princess—but not with the Prince."

Sally had seen Mrs. Siddons as Isabella, which was delightful. Godwin made her describe that great woman again, how she looked, how she moved, how she spoke, what she was like. She was beautiful, Sally told him, with a long nose, like his own, which even at ten years old was aquiline, the nose of command.

He had read those three plays over and over again, and he knew almost the whole of "Othello" by heart, muttering the lines to himself, in long hours of sleeplessness, when the May sunshine was in the van and Sally still snoring. He had never slept in the bracken after the loss of Nick; his mother being afraid of adders, and he miserable without the dog that had nestled beside

him, and loved him dearly, sleeping or waking. The van was not half such a good place for sleep, and the hours from the first chirping of the birds before dawn, till Sally was awake and the business of the day began, were long and weary.

It was in those hours that he taught himself the great play, some instinct telling him that it was better worth remembering than "Fatal Curiosity," thrilling as that gruesome play might be. He learnt all the stirring scenes—and was Othello and Iago by turns—and Cassio and the Doge, and Desdemona and Emilia. He felt the beauty of the language, without knowing why it was beautiful.

And now it occurred to Sarah Merritt to introduce her boy to another kind of poetry. She produced a well-thumbed Bible from the bottom of her trunk, and told Godwin how it was the book of books, and that until he had learnt all that was to be learnt in that volume he could never be sure of salvation.

"I ought to have read the gospel to you as soon as you were old enough to take it in," she told him. "It was wicked of me to be so neglectful—but there, I'm a busy woman, and mostly sleepy of an evening; and it was only last night when I heard you spouting 'Fatal Curiosity,' that I thought how you ought to be able to repeat the parables or the miracles, or the story of the Resurrection, when you lie awake—instead of that foolish play."

"It isn't a foolish play, mother. It makes me feel cold with horror as I think of it. And you told me how Mrs. Siddons used to act the mother. I can see her! So beautiful and so dreadful!"

Godwin could see anything he wanted to see. That eager young mind was always painting pictures upon the darkness. He could people night and silence with forms and voices.

The sacred book was another world for Godwin—first the gospel, those thirty years in Galilee, the exquisite life, the inexorable tragedy of the cross; and then the old, old history of the Jewish people: the stories of war and conquest, the picturesque and the dramatic: the forty years in the wilderness, the passage dryshod through the Red Sea, the miraculous crossing of the River Jordan, the dreams and strange visions, the sword of Gideon, Samson's heroic death, and Jephtha's fatal vow, the vision of Saul in the witch's cave. He read the scenes he loved best to his mother again and again in the dim light of the tallow candle, nestling close beside her in the cosy van-parlour, with all the Forest showing dimly through



the open door, and no sound in the night but the distant hoot of an owl. The ghostly and miraculous scenes were the things that thrilled him, and as he grew familiar with the Scriptures he knew somehow that the language in that book is tremendous, and outside all common diction, as Shakespeare's is.

Shakespeare and the Bible were Godwin's education till he was twelve years old.

His mother was delighted with his progress both in reading and acting. She made up her mind that he was a genius, and that nothing the world could give would be too good for him, and for her own part, all she could give of care and indulgence seemed a poor thing for this child of many gifts.

She thought of his rapid progress—how, having once acquired the art of letters, he had taught himself to write, on her business slate, and had even attained some knowledge of elementary arithmetic from her primitive account-books, questioning her about the prices of her goods, and the profit she made by selling them—adding and subtracting without rule or book, and soon making himself master of a simple system of mental arithmetic.

"There's not much more I can teach you, Monkey," Sally told her boy, with a sigh, after an exhaustive cross-examination from Godwin. "You'll have to go to school next year."

"No, I don't want to go to school. I can teach myself in the van. I'll never leave you or the Forest till I'm old enough to be an actor at Drury Lane."

Sally threw herself back among the heather with an uproarious laugh. It was summer, and they were sitting against a bank that made the boundary of one of the big enclosures, in a dell below Boldrewood, the van standing near, and Peggy taken out of the shafts and cropping the short turf contentedly. There was not much grass; but there were thistles and a little clover, and sprigs of young holly, and Peggy ate them as they came.

"What are you laughing at, mother?" Godwin asked sharply.

"The idea of your beginning to act at Drury Lane! Why, if you was the greatest genius God ever made—and I think you are a bit of a genius, Monkey—you'd have to begin at the beginning."

"What's the beginning for an actor?"

"You'd have to act at poor little country theatres, and worse places, sometimes in a barn—with only one scene, and a ragged curtain—and a blind fiddler—a fit-up, as they call it. You'd have to go from theatre to theatre—perhaps to walk all the way with your clothes in a bundle—and a hungry stomach."

"And to act Othello," said Godwin, with his eyes flashing.

To act, to act! That was what he wanted.

"Not you. They'd just make you act any scrub, with two or three lines to speak—a footman—or a messenger, anything, and they'd pay you just enough to keep you from starving—with the help of acorns, and blackberries, and nuts, that you might find on your way."

"Only a line to speak?" sighed Godwin.

He wasn't scared by the notion of feeding on acorns and blackberries—but not to act Othello, Iago, or Cassio! That meant despair.

"If you are to be an actor, my darling: and God knows I'd rather you could be anything else, for I know something of the theatres, and the hearts that are broken in them—but, if you're a genius, there'll be no holding you. If you are ever to be an actor, you must go slow, and first of all you'll have to be eddicated."

"Not at school. I should hate other boys, and I can learn all I want in the Forest, if I can get books."

To Godwin, able to read, education seemed easy. He was one of those who want only the three R's for educational capital, just to be able to read and write and cast up a column of figures; and all the rest will come. Macaulay could have begun upon as little; and Byron would have wanted no more. Perhaps Shakespeare had no more.

"The Kembles are great scholars, and they live among dukes and lords," said Sarah gravely. "They are fine gentlemen, and can do everything that a gentleman has to do—dance—and fence—and carry themselves gracefully—and speak foreign languages."

"I'll do it all," said Godwin; "I'm not afraid."

No, he was not afraid. He was an undaunted creature from his babyhood. He had climbed the highest beech in Mark Ash, without climbing-spurs. He had taught himself to swim against the rush of swollen streams, after the terrier's tragedy, hating himself for not having been able to save Nick. He was dauntless on land or water; fearless of man or beast.

It was a week after this conversation that Sally took it into her head to give her boy a treat. There had been a pony fair at Lyndhurst, a show and sale of Forest ponies on the "Swan" Green—and Sarah had stationed her van on the bit of open ground before the Swan Inn, and had done well with her brooms and brushes and baskets and rush mats.

"Monkey, would you like to go to the theatre to-morrow night?"

"A theatre." He thrilled with delight. "Drury Lane?"

"Lord bless the boy—the 'Lane' is in London, near a hundred miles off. But I've got to drive Peggy into Southampton to-morrow to get some more blacklead-brushes and dust-pans, and I'll take you. We'll have our tea in the van, and go to the theatre after tea. It may be two o'clock in the morning before we get home, but the moon's at the full, and Peggy will bring us safe over Hunter's Hill."

Godwin had no sleep all that night. To see a play acted! To see actors who were getting themselves ready for Drury Lane—the goal to which all of them must naturally be bound. Would the play be "Fatal Curiosity," or "Isabella," or "Othello"? He ardently hoped for "Othello." He had no idea of any other play than those three; though Sally had told him about a play called "Hamlet," in which there figured a wicked king and queen and a ghost; but her account of the tragedy had been too confused to impress him. He hoped the play to-morrow night would be "Othello."

He had never seen a town till he saw Southampton sparkling in the June sunlight, and it seemed to him the most wonderful place. It is, indeed, one of the prettiest towns in England—with its picturesque old gate at one end of the High Street, and the width of bright blue water at the other end—a broad, bright street, with houses that were quaint and old-world-looking in Godwin's time, and with shops that to him seemed magnificent. It was his first revelation of the riches of the earth. It was market-day, and the street was astir with that pleasant traffic of horses and carriages, wagon and gig, and family coach, and farmer's cart, such as can never be seen there any more; for the electric tram and the hooting motor-car now crowd the roadway that was once spacious enough for all the gentry and tradesmen in the little county, Southampton being county as well as town.

Sally made her purchases at a wholesale house near the market, and then drove the van up the street through the old archway, and away past the Star Hotel, when she turned at right angles and halted presently on an undulating expanse of grass that was called the Oundle, and where the surrounding houses were of a much humbler order than those of the High Street, and here she spent the day, doing a little business with the inhabitants, while Godwin sat in the van in a fever of impatience. He was

pinning to see the outside of the theatre, even if he must wait till night to see the inside. He had very little appetite for the hot roast beef and savoury baked potatoes to which his mother treated him at the inn facing the Oundle, and he counted every minute in the long afternoon, till the van was driven into the inn yard, to be left there perhaps till midnight, and Peggy accommodated with a stall. Then with newly washed face, clean collar, and neatly brushed hair, he took his mother's hand to trudge to the theatre.

Southampton was no doubt a better nurse of the drama in those days than she is now, for counter attractions were not so many, but the theatre of those days—in which great men and women had acted—was a shabby building in an old street leading down to the water, behind the market and the High Street. To the boy who knew nothing of stateliness but the grandeur of towering oaks and beeches the shabby little playhouse was fine, and it was with rapture that he went out of the golden light of a June sunset into the semi-darkness of a narrow passage that led to the pit; and oh, the breathless wonder of that ineffable moment when a low black door opened and the splendour of his first theatre broke upon him!

The fiddlers were playing Rossini's overture to the "Gazza Ladra," and the lively music thrilled him. The oil lamps, dim perhaps to eyes accustomed to the great chandelier of Drury Lane, dazzled him. The dress-circle, with its worn red velvet cushions, and white-and-gold paint, was splendid in his unaccustomed eyes, and the drop curtain—where the balcony scene in "Romeo and Juliet" was depicted with a daring force of colour—thrilled him. It was the first picture that he had ever seen; and he remembered it years afterwards as something fine, even when he knew the man who painted it, and what a daub it was.

A woman was hawking nuts and gingerbeer, pushing her way between the wooden benches, on which very few people were sitting, and the boxes were even more scantily peopled; but high up near the ceiling there was a noise of stamping feet, and men and women talking, heedless of the music that ravished Godwin's sensitive ear. A year or two later he would have felt every false note, every dissonance in pitch. To-night the bright melody charmed him.

The play was "Hamlet"—that play with the ghost and the wicked king, which Sally had done her best to describe—the tragedy of tragedies, which she had seen acted by the great John



Kemble. Godwin nestled against her shoulder, panting with excitement. "I shall see the ghost," he whispered, hardly able to contain himself.

"Gingerbeer, lemonade, bill of the play," bawled the woman with the basket, and they were laughing and squabbling up there under the ceiling. Nobody seemed overawed by the expectation of the ghost.

The lessee and actor-manager of those days was a gentleman of some culture, a Cambridge man, and ranked high in the pretty town for his gentility. His father had been a canon of Salisbury, and he had a brother in the army. He was an M.A. of Pembroke; but he was about as bad an actor as could be found in the provincial theatres of the United Kingdom, and he was sixty years of age.

This was Godwin's first Hamlet.

"He's quite an old man," the boy whispered. He thought it strange that Hamlet's mother should be a slim fair-haired girl, with a thin feeble voice, and desperately afraid of her son. It was not Gertrude overawed by Hamlet, but Miss Beverley paralysed by fear of her manager, who complimented her after the closet scene by telling her she was the worst queen he had ever met with.

To Godwin it was all thrilling, no matter how elderly Hamlet might look, nor in what solemn sing-song he might deliver the great speeches, after the Kemble tradition. All provincial Hamlets in those days founded themselves on J. K., as they called him; and they all believed that stage language ought to be unlike all other human speech.

The ghost was an ancient stroller with a fine figure and a deep voice, a man who had been a good actor for thirty years, and was no nearer a London engagement now than when he first breathed that atmosphere of sawdust, lamp oil, and orange-peel, which was once the air that the drama respired.

The boy sat breathless from the moment when the act-drop rose on the rampart at Elsinore and he heard the tramp of the sentinel on the battlements; from that moment till the green curtain fell on a stage strewn with corpses. For him everything was thrilling, every personage was real. No matter that Hamlet's voice was hoarse and his pronunciation eccentric. He was Hamlet the Dane: Hamlet, who lived only to avenge his father's murder. No matter that Ophelia was twenty years older than Hamlet's mother. Her scraps of song in a worn-out old voice thrilled him; and when the young queen told the story of her

death he shed tears. He left the pit when the play was over, with automatic movements, like a sleep-walker. There was a comic song being sung by a man in a red wig and a smock-frock in front of the drop-scene, a dreadful song about beer—"For I loves my drop of good beer, I'm uncommonly fond of my beer"—and there was to be an after-piece, "The Rendezvous," but Godwin wanted nothing after "Hamlet." He hated that comic singer, bawling about his beer, and was glad when his mother hurried him out of the theatre.

"I was afraid you wouldn't like to come away till it was all over," Sally said, "but it's close upon eleven. Mr. Conroy was so slow. If I didn't talk a bit faster than him when I'm selling my brooms I should never get through a day's work."

Sally, who had the colloquial arts of a cheap-jack, spoke with a consciousness of superiority.

Mr. Conroy was the lessee and M.A., and Conroy was a stage name, respect for his genteel connections forbidding his use of the family name in the play-bills.

It was late when they left the Oundle, and midnight had struck from Redbridge Church when Peggy began to climb Hunter's Hill, Sally leading her, and Godwin walking ahead. Sitting in the van or walking on the dusty road, the boy was in the same entrancing dream. He was dreaming of the time when he would be acting Hamlet, all through that slow journey to the glen below Boldrewood, where the brown tents were stationed. He and his mother walked more than half the distance; but he kept for the most part a little way in front of Sally and the mare. He didn't want his dream broken. He was dreaming of his future, and he saw all things in the golden dream-light. He fancied himself grown up, fifteen or sixteen, and taller than Mr. Conroy. He was acting Hamlet. His thoughts flashed from scene to scene in a fever—the scene with the ghost—with Ophelia. He would not be so rough with that poor loving lady as Conroy had been. He would let her see how sorry he was for her; he would fall on his knees at her feet, and kiss her hand and cry over it, perhaps—anything to show her that he loved her fondly in spite of those wild words. He saw himself in the fight with Laertes. He must learn how to fight—not with sticks, like the gipsies, but with slim shining swords. He would not totter, nor bend at the knees like Mr. Conroy. He thought he could teach himself—remembering so vividly every thrust and parry of the two men, how they stamped with their feet, and flung their bodies backwards and forwards in the heat of the contest, Laertes always

vigorous, Hamlet feeble and shuffling. Oh, those dreams of youth, when desire is taken for power, when the wretched rhymester thinks himself a Byron, and the stage-stricken lad sees himself as great as Garrick. Godwin little knew how heavily his childish vanity would have to be paid for in years of difficulty and heartache. He tramped through the dust under the magical moonlight in the ecstasy of a dream that was to last for years ; and the world he walked in was an enchanted world.

Perhaps to have been reared in that exquisite Forest, to have grown from infancy to boyhood in the free air of heaven, in rosy mornings and golden sunsets, and under starry skies, may have helped to make him a dreamer, too ready to believe that his life was to be beautiful. He and his mother sat late over their supper of bread and cheese, and small beer from a stone jar ; and in his happiness he could even laugh at the man with a red nose who loved a drop of good beer, and whose song Mrs. Merritt thought the best part of the entertainment. But it was dreadful to be told that the red-nosed man was one of the grave-diggers whom Hamlet had conversed with.

" Mother, I must have the book of ' Hamlet.' Will you buy one for me when you go to Southampton ? or, the next time we go as far as Totton, will you give me sixpence and I'll walk on to Southampton and get one ? "

Sally didn't think he would get " Hamlet " for sixpence, but she promised him that if he would be patient and wait till her next journey to the big town, she would try and get him Shakespeare's plays, all the plays in one book.

" What, are there more of Shakespeare's plays ? "

Many more : more than Sally had ever seen acted, though she had seen a good many. She had seen all the best of them. She told the boy about Macbeth, about Richard the Third, the wicked hunchback who had his nephews murdered and everybody's head chopped off ; and King John, with Kemble as the King, and Mrs. Siddons as Constance.

### CHAPTER III

THE boy gave no sign of impatience as the days went by, though it was more than a month before Sarah's next visit to Southampton, and the weeks seemed ages in his longing for the book of "Hamlet." He would have loved to go to that wonderful theatre again; but he had seen Sally paying out her shillings for the pit, and for their dinner, and something to the ostler for sitting up late to take care of Peggy; and he did not want her to spend her money for him. She earned her living by harder work than the gipsies, who told fortunes, and who had many crooked ways of getting money without labour. He thought how when he was older his mother might let him walk into Southampton of a summer evening, when the tents were on that side of the Forest; and he could go up into that noisy place under the ceiling, the gallery Sally called it—which would cost only sixpence—sixpence for an evening in the dream-world—an evening of wonder.

At last there came a blissful sundown when Sally came back to the camp with big parcels of scrubbing-brushes, dust-pans, and tin teapots, a little bit of grocery, and among all these goods the book that Godwin longed for—all Shakespeare's plays, in a thick octavo, bound originally in heavy old calf, but now literally half bound, since one side of the cover was wanting, and the volume was altogether in a somewhat shabby state, though it had cost Mrs. Merritt eighteenpence, and she had been to every bookshop in the town before she lighted upon it.

The boy was enchanted, and insisted on reading the scene between Hamlet and the ghost to his mother that night, indifferent to their supper, which was better than usual, as Sally generally brought something extra from Southampton market.

He read till she fell asleep, and then crept to his little bed behind a curtain, for within the last year his mother had curtained off half the van for her boy, and contentedly occupied the other half, which was also their kitchen and parlour. Godwin's half was next the door, and he could lie on his mattress and watch the stars moving in the purple vault, millions of miles away. He



knew something of those unspeakable distances now—for one of the gipsies had told him—and he wondered that he should once have thought those lovely lights so near the topmost branches. And he could hear the forest-leaves trembling in the night wind, and the frogs croaking, through long hours of sleeplessness. As a child he was a wretched sleeper, nor did he improve in that respect as he grew towards manhood.

For weeks, for months, after that night, the book made him happy. He carried Shakespeare about with him as he had carried the Bible. On warm days he lay among the fern and read ; and when winds were cold he walked in one of the enclosures, sheltered by Scotch firs and young oaks, and pored over the closely printed pages, very small print in double columns. All that wonder-world of the great poet had to be squeezed a good deal to make one book contain it. He fastened upon Richard the Third ; he fastened upon Macbeth and Shylock—the characters in which his mother had seen those famous actors of whom she loved to talk.

“ How happy you must have been, mother, to go to the theatre so often,” he said ; but she shook her head somewhat sadly.

“ It was all in the day’s work, Monkey,” she answered ; “ if I must tell you the truth I was in service, only a servant, and I went to the playhouse of an evening because I had nowhere else to go.”

“ Your mistress must have been very kind to let you see so many plays,” remarked Godwin, with his meditative air. “ But didn’t she want you at home of an evening ? ”

“ No—not before twelve o’clock.”

“ You must have been very happy,” sighed Godwin.

It was only a few nights after this when the boy, lying awake in the small hours, and repeating Macbeth’s speeches in the banquet scene, his voice growing louder as he abandoned himself to the magic of the thrilling situation—his mother on the other side of the green baize curtain was roused from her peaceful slumber.

“ Not asleep yet, Monkey ? Why, Minstead Church clock has struck two.”

Their station was in Canterton Glen, under the long ridge of Stony Cross, a favourite camping ground of the gipsies, for here travellers sometimes came to see the spot where the Red King was killed, and might be beguiled into having their fortunes told.

The boy was too absorbed to hear Sally's remonstrance.

"What man dare, I dare ;  
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,  
The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger ;  
Take any shape but that——"

"Was there ever such a boy ?" muttered Sarah ; "not twelve years old, and able to spout like an experienced actor."

She heard the horror in his voice, and wondered how he came by that power.

"Godwin, don't you hear me ?"

"What ? Are you awake, mother ?"

"More shame to you for waking me. Two o'clock, and I must be up at five, for it's my day for Sway, and a long round over the hill by Picket Post. Why don't you go to sleep ?"

"I can't. I never sleep much, but I'm quite happy, going over my scenes."

His scenes ! He had made them his own already. Richard, Hamlet, Macbeth. He wanted no playfellows while he could hide himself in the Forest deeps, and act. Something told him that he acted better than Mr. Conroy, the elderly Hamlet in the wrinkled black silk stockings and black velvet tunic.

"Mother, I must be an actor," he said, with breathless eagerness. "You won't stop me, will you, mother dear ?"

He was very fond of her. She must always be first in his heart, before himself. He would never disobey her ; but he *must be an actor*. That seemed inevitable.

"You wouldn't be so cruel as to stop me," gasped the boy, after waiting for her to speak.

"Cruel to stop you, oh, my darling. The cruelty would be the other way. You don't know what a starvation trade it is. Ten shillings a week, perhaps, and sometimes not paid. Hunger and toil half the time, Godwin. Padding the hoof on the hard roads, through the summer dust or the winter snow !"

"Ten shillings a week !" echoed Godwin, who knew just enough of life to know that the men who ploughed the fields had more than that. "Why you told me John Kemble was rich !"

"John Kemble ! You might just as well talk of the King. There's one John Kemble, just as there's one King George."

"I don't care—I mean to be a great actor, mother, like John Kemble."

"Bless the boy, what a spirit he has," cried Sarah ; "but oh,

my dear, if you don't want to break my heart, and your own afterwards, give up the very thought of acting except in your play-time, just to keep yourself amused. I want you to be a carpenter. I've been saving my money for the last three years to get you apprenticed to Mr. Slogmore in Lyn'urst. He's a good, sober man, and it's a nice clean trade, and everybody will respect you, if you're clever at it ; but everybody looks down upon an actor."

" You said John Kemble was a great gentleman, that dukes and lords thought much of him."

" Kemble again ! Oh, my poor dear, you don't know what hundreds of half-starved actors there are tramping about the country, acting in barns and at fairs, and perhaps every one of 'em thought he was going to be a Kemble."

" I don't mind starving or tramping. You know I can walk pretty well, to S'thampton and back, four-and-twenty miles, and never feel tired."

" Ah, but forty miles a day, maybe, with a hungry maw. You don't know, Monkey, you don't know ! "

" I know that I shall be an actor, mother, if you don't stop me."

" There ! go to sleep and dream about it ; and I'll dream that you're apprenticed to Mr. Slogmore and getting clever with your plane and saw."

Five minutes after that speech Sarah was snoring ; but Godwin was twisting feverishly from side to side on his hard mattress, breathing deep sighs over the problem of life.

Could he do anything that would hurt that tender mother, the fullness of whose love he understood as few children do ?

Could he give up his chance of being as fine a Hamlet as John Kemble ?

Things went happily for another year with mother and son. They wandered about with their gipsy friends, and the van and the brown tents were inseparable ; but Mrs. Merritt kept in touch with her customers in the villages, and Godwin went with her, and kept her accounts in his rough-and-ready way, and talked no more about being an actor. But he spent all his leisure hours in the cherishing of his dream ; and in those long days when his mother was busy at her wash-tub, or cleaning the little home upon wheels, or making whortleberry jam with the berries he had picked for her, Godwin would lie in some woodland bower, or tramp across the wind-blown moor, making himself master of his last Shakespearian hero, Richard or Macbeth, Romeo or

Lear. They were all delightful to him. He exercised his voice in those solitudes, until it began to give promise of that wonderful organ which was afterwards the delight of his world. It was a tenor now, but it was to change by and by when it broke. He acted to his heart's content, while for audience he had only the wild deer and the herons fishing in the stream hard by; and sometimes when Uncle Ephraim asked him he would act for the gipsies in the evening, and these good people thought it unkind of the boy that he would not perform one of his scenes before the gentlefolks, who sometimes left their post-chaise at Stonycross and came down the glen to look at the place where Tyrrel's arrow glanced off the tree and killed the Red King. The travellers would have given the lad money for his pains; some of which would have found its way into the brown tents, for he was a generous boy.

No, he would act before no strangers, till he acted on a stage like Mr. Conroy's.

Sarah Merritt loved this son of hers with a love so profound that it was not difficult for her to believe that he was a genius, and that, while incompetent actors and dull dogs had starved, her son might win fame and fortune. She had seen the effect of the boy's acting on the faces of the gipsies sitting round in the firelight, and if they—who knew nothing of the theatre—could be so moved by a boy standing alone, without costume or scenery, in the uncertain light, what might happen by and by if she could get Godwin properly educated? It was in her mind always that Kemble was a man of culture. Her boy must first have some superior schooling, she thought, and then serve his apprenticeship to dramatic art, on the provincial stage. She sighed as she thought what a long apprenticeship it might be—how much longer than the carpenter's—and how much less certain of profit the trade would be when it was learnt.

Fortunately for the boy Mrs. Merritt's knowledge of the hardships of the actor's life was tempered by her ardent love of the play-house, and she did not persist in her endeavour to keep the son she adored out of that perilous pathway—where there are more thorns than flowers, and ten chances of disappointment and humiliation, hunger and houselessness, against one of wealth and fame. She might laugh at his arrogance, his childish confidence in his own powers, but in the back of her mind there was a fond belief in his genius. Had he not made the gipsy women cry when he acted the scene with Hubert and Arthur, alternating the man's strong voice, and the child's



tender treble, with an art that showed the born actor? Reluctantly, and not without tears, she surrendered her day-dream of the carpenter's shop—the nice clean trade, and wholesome odour of pine shavings, the neat cottage and garden, where her last years might be spent, when she was too old to go about with her van; the beehives on one side, the flower-garden in front of the parlour window, and the plot of cabbages and potatoes behind the kitchen—all so homely and so sweet; and perhaps the village beauty for a wife. She gave up that humble vision, because her boy was God-gifted, and might be as famous as George Frederick Cooke. He would never be like the Kembles. He was fire where they were ice.

She gave up her dream of the cottage and the garden, the restful life, the cleanliness, the pure country air, blowing over miles of pasture and wood, the respect of her neighbours, the friendly countenance of the Vicar. She gave up all, to cast her lot with her son among the rogues and vagabonds, the wandering mummers, who tramp and toil in the long apprenticeship of the stage. What sacrifice would she not have made for Godwin? He never knew what heartache and wakeful nights this renunciation cost her.

Once resolved, Sarah Merritt knew no half-measures. She was a woman of indomitable energy, and a noble courage. If the actor's life meant starvation she had to face it—for she no more thought of parting with her boy than of cutting off her right arm.

The first step was to get him educated, and Sally cast about for the means. The camp being in Gretnam Wood that summer—shifting its tents very often as the law demanded, yet seldom going above a quarter of a mile from the ashes of yesterday's fires—she had gone one Sunday evening to Lyndhurst Church, and had been greatly impressed by the preacher she heard there, a young Irishman, with a strong brogue, and a dramatic delivery. Her customers in the village had gossiped with her about this young man, who was kind, and free-spoken, with no foolish pride about him, very poor, they thought, for he lived in a couple of rooms over the general shop, at the corner of the Romsey Road. It was a poor little shop, and the house was a cottage with a thatched roof and dormer-windows. He lived on herrings and potatoes and scrag of mutton; and he never went to Southampton in the coach, nor gave himself a treat of any kind; but he was a gentleman and a scholar, and had heaps of books in the parlour over the shop, books on the table, on the chairs, on the floor.

It was all Mrs. Bell could do to get his consent to her dusting them once a week, when she cleaned his room.

Meditating upon this description of the Curate, Mrs. Merritt put on her best gown and bonnet, and one fine morning walked into Lyndhurst, where she boldly entered the shop, being well known there both as dealer and customer, and said she had come to wait upon Mr. O'Brien, if he would be so good as to see her on a matter of business. Mr. O'Brien consented to receive this unexpected visitor, his landlady pleading for her, as an honest creature. What could she possibly want with a B.A. of Trinity, Dublin? Mr. O'Brien asked himself, as he laid down his churchwarden pipe. His room was very untidy, and his table was covered with books and papers. He was writing a book, a book that was to get him his D.D. degree; and the pursuit of literature, except in some rare cases, does not make for orderly surroundings.

"Sit ye down, my good lady, and tell me what it is I can do for you," he said, in his mellow Irish voice, a voice that set Sally at her ease.

She unfolded her purpose without fear. She told him about her wonderful boy, a genius, who had never had any schooling. She had taught him to read; and he had taught himself to write; and he had read Shakespeare and the Bible; and that was all. And she wanted him to be a scholar, for he had set his heart upon being an actor.

"An actor," cried O'Brien; "sure, it's divelish little scholarship those gentry want, I take it."

Sarah rebuked him for the slur. Of course she told him about John Kemble. A great actor who was to act "Shakespeare's plays" must be an educated gentleman; and that was what her boy was to be.

"But sure, ma'am, it's a quair trade for a sensible woman like yourself to choose for her son. Wouldn't it be better to 'prentice the lad——?"

"To a chimney-sweep? Yes, sir, so it would. But I love the boy too well to refuse him anything he has set his heart upon."

"That's the way with mothers, ma'am, and that's why there are so many poor divels walking about without shoes to their feet. And were you after asking my advice about your son, when you had made up your mind already?"

"I want to ask you for something more than advice, sir. I want you to give him a bit of schooling. He's so quick that

a very little bit of teaching by a clever gentleman like you will go a long way with him."

The Curate looked at her with amused wonder. He had thought of taking pupils to prepare for their Little-go, and had put an advertisement in the county paper to that effect; but no applications from eager parents or guardians had come to "B.A., Post Office, Lyndhurst"; and now here was this honest-looking creature in a clean print gown, and a housemaid's bonnet, come to offer him his first pupil. Sally saw him ponder and hesitate, so went boldly on.

"I know I'm asking a great favour, sir," she said, "for it's very little I can offer to pay—being a poor woman that has to work hard to feed myself and my son, and to keep a coat on his back."

And then she told him how she lived among the gipsies in the Forest, and how the sickly infant had grown into a strong healthy lad under that spacious roof of heaven; and somehow she contrived to interest Patrick O'Brien, who had a strong tincture of romance in his disposition.

"I'm ashamed to name it, sir, but the most I could pay would be two guineas a quarter, and if you would condescend to take that sum for as much education as you would like to give him, I should bear a grateful heart towards you for the rest of my days."

O'Brien had reckoned on at least twenty guineas for helping some rustic squire's young hopeful to get through the Little-go. He gave a long, low whistle at Sally's figure.

"Forty-two shillings! And there's thirteen weeks in the quarter. If I was to give the boy three lessons a week—three lessons of an hour—the pay would be a fraction over a shilling an hour. A house-painter gets half as much as that, ma'am—but"—he went on, melting at sight of the woman's crestfallen countenance—"bring your gossoon to-morrow afternoon, and if I like his looks, I'll try what I can do with him for at least one quarter. Bedad, he must be a prodigious genius if he can make such progress on three hours a week."

"He will, sir, I don't fear for him," and Sarah curtsied herself out of the little parlour, murmuring words of gratitude till she was outside the door.

"Come at four o'clock," shouted the Curate, as she went downstairs, "and I'll give you a dish of tea."

The good young man was as fond of tea as Dr. Johnson was, and took nearly as much of it, but he had no club of jovial

roysterers, with whom to enjoy more stimulating liquor, as the philosopher of Fleet Street had. He mused for a few minutes before he went back to his book, the biography of one of the Fathers of the Church, saint and eremite.

"Two guineas!" he thought. "There's not much to be got out of two-and-forty shillings! Yes"—looking down at his serviceable feet—"it'll buy me a pair of Wellingtons, and nobody could deny that I want um; for it's as much as these will do to hold together till the end of the quarter."

The church clock was striking four when Mrs. Bell ushered Sarah and Godwin into the Curate's parlour. The tea-tray was on the table, with a big brown crockery teapot, some gaudy Staffordshire cups and saucers, all blue and red, and a plate of substantial bread and butter.

"Sit ye down, mother and son," said the Curate, motioning his visitors to the only two chairs that were unencumbered with literature, "and draw up to the table, and help yourselves to bread and butter," and then, after keenly observing the boy, who was shy and silent in the scholar's company, he turned to the mother, and said *sotto voce* :

"He's got an oi, ma'am."

Those wonderful eyes rarely failed to make an impression—the pale face and delicate aquiline nose, the long dark hair falling loosely over the clean collar, made a distinguished *ensemble*. Patrick thought he had never seen so picturesque a boy—so strange—so different from the average lad of twelve years old.

"Faith, ma'am, there's something remarkable about the omathaun, and I'll do what I can for him. And what might the spalpeen's name be, ma'am?"

"Godwin."

"A very good name. And his Christian name?"

"He was christened Godwin."

"Then he's Godwin Godwin?"

"Godwin Godwin, if you like," Sarah answered, with an angry light in her eyes that indicated it were better not to inquire into the matter too nicely.

However the homely looking woman had come by this elfin son, she seemed an honest creature, and the Curate was inclined to trust her.

"Well, ma'am, I'll take your boy for an hour—say, from eleven to twelve—three mornings a week, Monday, Wednesday,



and Friday. It isn't much for the cultivation of the humanities, but we may manage the rudiments—a little bit of Latin, and a taste of arithmetic; and a peep into ancient and modern history—just enough to make him want to find out more for himself. If he's as clever as you think him, we have but to open the doors of the temple of knowledge for him, and he'll go in and help himself as greedily as a schoolboy in a tuck-shop."

This was over Sarah's head, but she understood that Mr. O'Brien meant kindly, and she was sure she would get her two guineas' worth by the end of the quarter. It would be much for her wildling of the woods to be allowed to sit in that cosy parlour and associate with a gentleman and scholar, three hours a week. Godwin was looking round the room, his eyes wide with astonishment at the sight of so many books.

"Have you got any plays, sir?" he asked presently, when he had surveyed that wealth of learning. "Have you got Shakespeare?"

"Shakespeare, and a sight of others. Marlow, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and Ford, and Massinger. There's more plays in the world than Shakespeare's, youngster, though he is the best of the Elizabethans, *facile princeps*. But there's tragedies two thousand years old that some folks think finer than Shakespeare's."

Godwin went back to the camping-ground with a light heart. The Curate's good-humour had set him at his ease, and he was sure that kind gentleman would let him read some of those other plays. His appetite for the drama was insatiable; and in spite of his worship of Shakespeare, he wanted new worlds to explore.

He was punctual to the striking of the church clock on Monday morning, full of young zeal and energy, the long walk from the camp having seemed as nothing, foot and heart being so light.

There was no royal road to learning in those days. Little Arthur had not been catered for by the makers of school-books. There was no gentle step-by-step acquaintance with noun and adjective, pronoun and verb, as exemplified in the doings of Caius and Balbus; but with much help from his teacher Godwin managed to tackle the old Eton Latin grammar in all its dryness. It was uphill work; but the boy had a wonderful memory, a memory trained by those long soliloquies and dialogues which he had learnt as he roamed by the brook, or lay among the heather and fern. Mr. O'Brien gave him an honest hour over that dry-as-dust grammar, and he had mastered the first declension when the clock struck twelve—whereupon his master put on his hat,

and walked a couple of miles with the pupil on his homeward way. Godwin had kept no secrets from him, and had told him how his mother and he lived among the gipsies ; but had their own van, which was their home wherever they went.

“ And do you like that kind of roving life ? ”

“ I shouldn't like any other kind of life—not till I am old enough to be an actor.”

“ Then you've made up your mind about that, though you've been told it's a starvation trade ? ”

Godwin shook his head, and again John Kemble, and Garrick, and George Frederick Cooke were brought forward to show how an actor might be glorious and rich.

“ Well, when you've got to climb a ladder, it's best to keep your eyes on the top,” said Mr. O'Brien, and then he told Godwin how he too had once thought of the stage as a profession, after acting in “ *Bombastes Furioso* ” at Trinity College ; but how the thought of his father, who had pinched himself in his poor rectory to pay for the son's education, had made him stick to his work : and then he gave the boy a taste of his quality, reciting Othello's speech before the Senate, and Wolsey's farewell, in a fine baritone that awoke the echoes in the beech-wood, and Godwin told him that he had a better voice than Mr. Conroy, the manager of the Southampton theatre. From this day the Curate and the boy were something more than teacher and pupil. They were chums. And after the hour's lesson, punctiliously performed, Mr. O'Brien would keep Godwin with him, and converse with him, or read to him, having a great love of hearing his own voice, a craving which he could seldom satisfy outside his church ; for his parishioners in the Forest village were by no means literary, and took but the faintest interest in anything beyond the humdrum of every-day existence—having but a vague knowledge even of public affairs, and feeling that while we had Nelson and Collingwood there was no need for anxiety about anything except the price of bread.

The Curate read the choicest bits of his book to Godwin, whereby the pupil learnt something of those dim ages in which the saints who made the Church had starved and suffered in desert caves, or had been murdered by apostate emperors. Godwin was always learning something, quick and eager as a bird picking worms out of a grass lawn after a rainfall. And by way of reward, the Curate would read a scene out of the “ *Broken Heart* ” or “ *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* ” ; and Godwin would listen entranced. And then, in a walk through the Forest,

Mr. O'Brien would tell him something of the history of that lovely land in which he was living, and of other more romantic countries, which the Curate had never seen, but where he hoped to travel some day, though he might have to go on foot, as Oliver Goldsmith had gone.

"Sure I'd suffer as much hardship as the saints of old for a sight of Rome," said Patrick, and then he had to tell his pupil all he knew about the eternal city, the good popes, and the wicked popes: Gregory the Great and Alexander the Sixth; and Godwin walked beside him with parted lips and staring eyes, thrilled by the wonder of that unknown world.

The Curate introduced him to Byron and Scott, and lent him "Marmion" and the "Corsair" to read on his idle days. He crammed his pupil with the knowledge of all the things he himself loved, being a romantic creature, with an enthusiasm for all that is lovely in the past or the present. He had quickly discovered that the boy was an exceptional boy, and he conversed with him as with an equal in understanding and capacity. He became indeed so keenly interested in his pupil, that he insisted upon visiting the shifting camp of brown tents, and making friends with the gipsies, and, without any strenuous attempt to proselytise, he had the satisfaction of baptising three or four brown babies in the church at Lyndhurst, on which occasion he presented the mother of each squaller with a shilling copy of the New Testament. The gipsies liked him for his easy, kindly ways, and his praise of their free and changing home.

"I should like to live under green boughs myself," he told them, "and make friends with the Forest deer; but I must sit in a stuffy room, and toil with pen and ink, till I win my way to a living in the South of Ireland: and then it's a bit of a horse I may have, and a gallop after the hounds with the best of the neighbours."

When summer came, and the Forest enclosures were dazzling with wild hyacinths, and the blossom of the hawthorn filled every glade with perfume and beauty, Godwin's education was conducted entirely under the blue sky. A pencil and a sheet of paper were enough material for the hour's formal teaching, the irregular verb to be learnt, and the twenty lines of "Virgil" to be construed—and when the Curate's turnip silver watch recorded the accomplished hour, the Reverend Patrick would lie on his back on a ferny bank and smoke the pipe of peace, while Godwin read Shakespeare, or Scott, or Byron, or a chapter of David Hume's history, sometimes, by way of duty.

"I want to do the best I can for you," O'Brien told him; "it isn't much your mother can pay me, but it's her hard scrapings, poor soul, and I'd like her to have her money's worth."

Sometimes—loving to talk—he would try to initiate this neophyte of his into theological mysteries—and even lead him into the dim world of metaphysics—and before the first year was finished, Godwin was strong enough to ask embarrassing questions, and even to argue simple points with his master.

He loved the Old Testament as a collection of grand romantic stories of prophets and heroes, but, like Samuel Coleridge, his reason rejected the idea that all those records of sanguinary warfare and heartless treachery, of massacres of men and slaughter of unoffending beasts, had been inspired by the Ruler of the Universe, whom he was told to believe in as a just and merciful God.

"I don't believe the Almighty told them to slay the Amalekites, or that He put it into the heart of Jael to kill the soldier who took refuge in her tent," he declared boldly. "If I did believe it I'd leave off saying my prayers. Nobody but a fool would pray to an unmerciful God."

When it came to metaphysics the boy was dense, and made no progress.

"It seems going such a long way round to prove that black and white are different," he complained. "When one knows a thing, what's the use of all that trouble to find out why one knows it?"

His master only laughed, and told him he was hopeless; and after this he never asked him to read the categories of Aristotle, or a page of Dugald Stewart.

John Stuart Mill's "Logic" was not written in those days, or the boy might have taken more kindly to the study of abstract questions.

For two years this happy association of the B.A. of Trinity and the Forest boy went on without one jarring incident, and then when Godwin had shot up into a lanky stripling of fourteen, and was beginning to think himself tall enough for Hamlet, a sudden and unexpected close came to that easy education. It had been indeed "reading without tears," and Godwin had acquired more knowledge than most boys of his age contrive to accumulate at Rugby or Harrow—without any help from Caius and Balbus, or from histories condensed and sugared over for "Little Arthur."



The Curate had taught him mostly by word of mouth ; and, in sheer love of hearing himself talk, had contrived to fill the boy's growing intelligence with all that he had himself acquired in the orthodox classical training, and in long evenings of somewhat desultory reading. It had been a lucky day for Godwin when Sarah Merritt had heard Mr. O'Brien preach, and had been inspired with the notion of making him her son's tutor. It was lucky, too, that the Curate's advertisement had not brought a single answer, and that no gentleman's family in the neighbourhood of Lyndhurst had furnished a youth to be crammed for his Little-go : in which event Mr. O'Brien could not have given all his leisure to a pupil who brought him forty-two shillings a quarter.

The unexpected happened when an old friend of Patrick's family gave him the desired living in the South of Ireland, an old vicarage in the valley of the Shannon, and two hundred a year for stipend, the glebe being some of the most fertile pasture in the sister kingdom, and the salmon-fishing incomparable.

" I shall be able to keep me horse and me boat," said Patrick, " and you shall come and stay at me vicarage when you're a man, and we'll go fishing together. Me parish is less than four Irish miles from Castle Connor, the beautifulest place on the earth, and the finest for salmon."

No prospect of delight in the far future could console Godwin for the loss of his comrade and friend. Nothing but the thought that he would soon be beginning his stage apprenticeship would have kept him from feeling heart-broken when he saw the Curate leave the Crown Inn, sitting at the back of the coach, with a huge chest of books and a very small portmanteau of clothes on the roof above him. The coach had left Dorchester that morning, and the Curate would awake in the small hours to find himself at an inn in the Borough, a fish out of water in the great City.

Godwin's schooling ended on that melancholy day. All that he ever learnt of the higher education after that was acquired by his own unassisted effort. The master being gone, the pupil went back to Shakespeare, and spent his days in Forest solitudes, shaping himself, as he thought, for the actor's trade ; reciting, trying the strength of his voice, flinging himself into dramatic attitudes, speaking Othello's dying speech, and falling as he thought Othello should fall—always spontaneous, and governed by the passion of the words that he spoke rather than by any preconceived idea of how the part should be acted.

## CHAPTER IV

IN the autumn and winter of that year Godwin walked into Southampton as often as he could absent himself from the evening meal without seeming to desert the kind mother, and gave himself the bliss of a night at the theatre; and he saw Mr. Conroy in Shakespeare's greatest creations often enough to discover that the Cambridge M.A. was an uninspired actor, and that the poorest performer in his company was very little worse than the manager.

But to see the five great plays — "Lear," "Richard the Third," "Hamlet," "Othello," and "Macbeth" — ever so badly performed was a delight to the boy who had only read them. However shabby the accessories, however wicked the acting, the play came to a more vivid life when he saw men and women moving about the stage, and heard living voices talking there.

The year waxed and waned. Godwin had grown out of his clothes. The best suit which he had worn every Sunday evening when he walked to Lyndhurst, and sat in the free seats to hear Mr. O'Brien's sermon, had now become ridiculous. The trousers stopped midway between his knees and his ankles. Expert as Sally was with her needle, she could do nothing but sigh over those unlucky trousers. He could wear them in the woods, but dared not show himself in town or village in that shrunken suit. Uncle Ephraim told him that he was a man. Not quite fifteen, but tall enough to pass for a man. The gipsies laughed at his long, lean figure.

This was enough. If he looked like a man, he could act Hamlet. Years mattered nothing. His mother bought him a pair of corduroy trousers at a Southampton slop-tailor's, and the first use he made of them was to start soon after sunrise, and walk fourteen miles to the shabby old street where that temple of the Muses, the Theatre Royal, Southampton, had for the last hundred years served as one of the nurseries of dramatic art.

It was half-past eleven when he went in at the stage door, and, having met nobody in the darkness of a narrow passage, stumbled up a short flight of stairs, and found his way to the side-scenes,

where he heard voices, and saw half a dozen seedy-looking people standing about on a sloping platform talking to each other in a curious undertone.

"A young man with a book in his hand and a pen behind his ear sprang upon the stranger on the instant, and asked him what he wanted there.

"I want to see Mr. Conroy."

"Mr. Conroy is engaged in the rehearsal. Have you an appointment?"

"No, the lanky youth with the pale face and long dark hair had no appointment with the manager; but he had walked fourteen miles that morning to see him.

"What's your business with him?"

"I want to be an actor."

"Where do you come from?"

"The Forest!"

This conveyed no distinct idea to the prompter, who had come from behind the counter in Clerkenwell, and did not know that there was a Forest in England outside the painted woods in the scene dock.

"You *look* very young. Are you a schoolboy?"

"No. I have finished my education."

He answered with a grand air, conscious that to have been Patrick O'Brien's pupil and companion for two years was enough.

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"Wait a bit," said the prompter, and he ran back to his place in the front of the orchestra, and Godwin, standing in the wing, listening and looking eagerly, presently saw him talking to an elderly gentleman in a long brown overcoat with two capes, who had been muttering and grumbling among those other dingy figures.

It was the reverse side of the picture that had looked so brilliant from the gallery, in the light of the oil-lamps, and it seemed all unspeakably dull and ugly.

The young man with the book came back to him presently, and told him that if he would call at number ten, Portland Street, at three o'clock that afternoon, Mr. Conroy would be so good as to see him. Godwin thanked the youth. Yes, he would call at that time; and he went stumbling down the steep stair, and groped his way back to the daylight, with his heart beating joyously.

The three-quarters were chiming from St. Michael's Church.

He had three hours and a quarter to wait before that interview which was to be the turning-point in his life. He had eaten nothing since seven o'clock, and he had sixpence in his pocket. But what of that? Godwin had never been one of those who live by bread alone. He would have fasted all that day, and walked his fourteen homeward miles fasting, without distress. He cared for nothing. French Street was glorified in the light that never was on sea or land, the light of young ambition and hope that has never been disappointed. He walked to the bottom of the street, and felt as if he was walking upon air; and the largest expanse of water that he had ever seen burst upon him in the noonday sun—golden water in a world that was all gold. He walked on that historic shore, light of foot, for an hour or more, admiring the mediæval gateways, the battlemented walls, the queer little nooks and crannies five centuries old.

The thought of that romantic past, as he saw it embodied in stone, thrilled him. Those granite walls and ruined Gothic windows had once been the palace of King John. This was Southampton, the port from which the fifth Henry, the "fierce extraordinary king" sailed for Harfleur and Agincourt, set forth to face the hazards of war with a joyous unconcern. Here Philip of Spain had come to claim the wife whose heart he helped to break: that hard heart which had no pity for the wives whose husbands died in the fires of Martyrdom, yet sickened to death at a husband's neglect.

The stone walls by the water, the old Tudor houses in Bugle Street and St. Michael's Square, were full of history. Godwin roamed in and out of narrow streets, always going back to the grey walls and the shining water. It was not difficult to get rid of time with so much to see and to think about. Yet at the back of his mind there was keen impatience for the passing of the hours, for that crucial interview with Mr. Conroy.

He had all the audacity of inexperience, all the self-confidence of boyhood that has never known failure, or the schoolmaster's cane. His mother and the Irish curate had spoilt him; Uncle Ephraim and the gipsy women and children had spoilt him. All that he had learnt in life had come to him easily. The things he had wanted to do he had always done. So it never occurred to him that Manager Conroy would refuse to let him tread that dusty stage which he had gazed at with hungry eyes from the wing. He only wanted speech with the manager, and all the rest would follow.

He dined at a little public-house at the foot of a narrow street,



where the grey old houses seemed almost a part of the thirteenth-century wall. He dined on a crust of bread and a slab of Dutch cheese and half a pint of porter, scarcely conscious of what he ate; and then, turning his back on the historic wall and the bright water, where three or four yachts were riding at anchor, he found his way to Portland Street, which was quite new and genteel.

He paced the street, keeping an eye upon "number ten," till a church clock struck three, and on the last stroke he knocked at the door. A young woman in a mob cap came tardily in answer to his modest knock.

"I am come to see Mr. Conroy," Godwin told her. "I have an appointment."

"First floor," she answered, and pointed to the staircase.

"Am I to go up?" Godwin asked, with a sudden touch of timidity.

"Yes, please. Door facing you."

She shut the street door, and disappeared in darkness at the back of the hall. A maid-of-all-work had no time to announce a lodger's visitors—even when that lodger occupied the first floor.

Godwin knocked at the door that faced him, and a voice called "Come in"—the fretful voice of a man better acquainted with the sour than with the sweets of life.

"Oh, it's you?" said an elderly man, sitting in an easy chair by the fire, reading a newspaper, which he flung aside impatiently as the lad came in. He was gaunt and narrow-shouldered, with lank grey hair and a clean-shaved chin and lips—thin lips, with as sour an expression as the pale grey eyes under shaggy brows that were scrutinising Godwin from top to toe.

"Oh, it's you," he said; "the boy who came to the theatre this morning? You want to go on the stage, you want to be an actor, do you? Young gentleman, do you know what that means?"

"No, sir, but I mean to be an actor: and if you won't let me act at your theatre I'll walk all over England till I find a manager who will."

"You're a fool, sir!" said Conroy fiercely, and the pale grey eyes came to life, and flashed angry fire at the boy. "Look at me," he said, grasping the arms of his chair with hands that trembled in his excitement. "Can you guess how old I am?"

"No, sir."

"I have lived sixty years in the world, and I have wasted

forty of those years on the stage. I was once a boy like you, sir, ardent, ambitious, 'of imagination all compact.' I had parents who loved me. My father was a gentleman, my mother was a lady. I have the blood of an ancient race in my veins, boy."

Godwin had been standing till now, but Mr. Conroy—who loved nothing better than to expatiate upon the sacrifices he had made for his art—relented, and motioned him to a distant chair.

"Sit down, boy. I was a gentleman born, and as such I was sent to Eton and to Cambridge. I am an M.A. of Pembroke, sir, and I was destined for the Church. One of my brothers is a dean, another of 'em is a general in the East India Company's service. But I was born with the actor's genius; and genius will have its way. At two-and-twenty I made my first appearance in the provinces, as Romeo. It was on the Norwich circuit. I acted on that circuit for three years, boy; but I had to see an illiterate beast, who massacred the King's English, put over my head in the leading business—had to act second to a scrub who ought to have been sitting on a stool in a solicitor's office, or sweeping out the office. I had private means, and I always lived like a gentleman. I gave up all my leisure hours to study. I made myself one of the most accomplished actors on the provincial stage. But what of that? There is no such thing as appreciation of fine acting from a provincial audience. I went to London, played five seasons at the Haymarket and Olympic; but at both theatres I was the victim of a conspiracy against young talent in any shape or form. The theatres were in the possession of old stagers who know how to strangle talent in any man under thirty. It cost me a hard struggle to get to London; and in London I was crushed—crushed, sir, by men who knew that their star was declining while mine was just above the horizon."

Mr. Conroy paused, pleased with his own eloquence, and enjoying himself in a sour way, as a man who rather liked the taste of dead-sea fruit. He felt that the boy with those luminous eyes must be thrilled by his speech.

"I had not the spirit that could be easily quenched, sir. I left the 'House of Bondage' in the Haymarket, and took a theatre of my own, and for the last five-and-twenty years I have been a provincial manager, giving my life and my means to the cultivation of all that is loftiest in dramatic art. Shakespeare would be dead in this country, sir, dead and forgotten, if there were no men like me, willing to sacrifice themselves at the shrine

of a great poet. There are very few of us—in point of fact I am the only martyr to the Shakespearian drama in all the provinces. It has never paid me. I am a loser year in and year out by my efforts. Yet I go on—and I shall die in harness. If I had not private means I should have starved—as you may starve. And now, young man, do you still want to be an actor ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

Godwin faced him steadily, the thin features rigid with resolve, the thin figure looking what it was, a frame of nerve and sinew, the wonderful eyes shining.

“ Just as much as before you heard my history ? ”

“ Just as much.”

“ Then you rather relish the idea of starvation ? ”

“ I have never cared much what I ate, sir.”

“ But you must eat something, boy, or perish.”

“ I think I could always earn a crust of bread, sir.”

“ Always ? Not by acting. You may do it by holding horses, perhaps.”

“ Then I'll hold horses, sir, as Shakespeare did.”

“ There were more horsemen in the streets in his day than there are now. Well, boy, I like your spirit, and I'll see what I can do for you.”

This was not so noble as it sounded, for Mr. Conroy had quarrelled with his “ general utility ” gentleman, who had sent in his notice, and the company would be short-handed in a week or so.

“ Thank you, sir, and will you let me act Hamlet ? ”

The manager threw his head back upon the cushion of his easy chair and laughed aloud.

It was Godwin's first taste of a cup of which he had to drink deep and often.

“ Hamlet ! In *my* theatre ! That is rather too good a joke. No, sir, I am the only Hamlet who will be seen on that stage till I take my last farewell.”

“ I beg your pardon, sir. Then if not Hamlet, I should like to act Laertes. I know all the speeches. I know the play from the first line to the last. I have walked about the old woods for a year reciting Shakespeare.”

“ I am not surprised to hear it. You have evidently come out of a wood. You are an absolute novice, sir, a child in dramatic art. You know nothing, and can do nothing, and may be paralysed with stage fright when you see the lamps in front of you—but as I admire your pluck I am willing to give you

a chance. I will engage you for a fortnight on trial to play general utility."

"What does that mean, sir?" Godwin asked respectfully, but with an air of equality that somewhat offended the great man.

"It means that you are to act anything or nothing; that you are to walk on whenever you are wanted; that your speaking parts may be six lines, or one line. Not Hamlet nor Laertes!" and again there was the sound of derision, the contemptuous laugh that cut like a whip.

"Very well, sir," the boy answered boldly, and the flush of angry pride made his lean face handsome. "I can wait. I mean to act Hamlet."

"You youngsters all mean that, boy. I am doing a great deal for you in letting you learn your trade in my theatre. There are a good many lads in this town who would pay me handsomely for the chance; but I suppose you will want to be paid?"

"If I am not to live upon air."

"Have you no means of your own?"

"None, sir."

"That's a bad beginning. Well, I will give you ten shillings a week, and you must get a cheap lodging, and do the best you can. My stage-manager will help you to find a room near the theatre."

Ten shillings! It was the wage his mother had named when she told him that the stage meant starvation. But in his ignorance of life he fancied he could do well upon ten shillings a week. It was more than a shilling a day; and he thought he could feed himself for sixpence, and pay for a lodging with the difference.

"Have you any stage wardrobe?"

Godwin owned that he had only the clothes he stood in, and another suit that was not as good. Whereupon Mr. Conroy, pleased with having secured this stripling—who was better-looking than the *ci-devant* attorney's clerk with whom he was parting in anger, and who was to receive five shillings a week less than that renegade—proceeded to describe the indispensable articles which the boy must provide for himself: the long stockings, described as "tights," black and white, which ought to be silk, but which might be cotton; boots, shoes; hat and feathers; sword and sword-belt. There were other things wanted, but these were indispensable.

Godwin's blood ran cold. He had never foreseen this difficulty.



"My stage wardrobe will provide you with costumes—shirts and shapes—square-cut coats and waistcoats and breeches—but these accessories you have to find for yourself, and the better they are, and the more pains you take with your appearance, the better you are likely to please the audience. You ought to have a good appearance a few years hence—but at present"—here the manager shrugged his shoulders, and smiled—"you are a trifle like a scarecrow, all legs and wings—and will want a good deal of indulgence—and a good deal of padding."

"When may I begin to act, sir?" asked Godwin, shutting his mind against difficulties that seemed insurmountable.

"We won't talk about acting, my lad. You may begin to go on the stage on Monday-week. You had better come to the theatre at two o'clock to-morrow, and I'll introduce you to my stage-manager, who will tell you what things you will have to get, and where to get them, which won't be in Southampton. We shall have finished the rehearsal by two o'clock. Good day to you," and Mr. Conroy resumed his newspaper.

"Thank you, sir."

Godwin went back to the open air, and the superior modern street, and hurried down to the river again, feeling as if he could breathe more freely in that nobler world of mediæval stone and blue water.

He was excited, but not elated. There was bitter disappointment in the idea that he might have to wait years before he could act Hamlet, or any of those Shakespearian characters that had lifted him off the common earth, carried him out of himself and all the realities of life, into a world of passion and poetry.

In those Forest depths, where no creature could hear his voice, he had been Othello, he had been Hamlet, he had been Lear—and now he was told that years must pass, years of toil and poverty—before he could stand upon the stage and embody one of those tremendous creations. He must be content to speak one line or six lines—must walk on and off the stage in a crowd, and stand dumb before the audience. He must do anything he was told—and first of all he must take his mother's hard-earned money to buy the things that he must have before he could tread the stage, even in that subordinate position.

To take money from his mother? He knew too well what self-denial had gone towards the saving of the quarterly two guineas that had paid for his education; and was he to call upon her poor little purse again, to buy him stage finery? to

call upon her who hated the idea of his being an actor, and who foresaw nothing but misery from the actor's trade?

His thoughts were gloomy enough as he walked through Redbridge and Totton—but, by the time he had tramped to the top of Hunter's Hill, the sanguine temper of boyhood was again in the ascendant, and he saw across that slough of despond of "general utility" a glorious vision of the success that was to surpass George Frederick Cooke's, and plant his foot upon the neck of John Kemble. From "general utility" to Hamlet and Othello was but a question of patience and determination. As the boy stood on the crest of the hill and looked towards the leafy solitudes of Iron's Hill and Busketts, the man whose character and fate flashed into his mind was not an actor—but a soldier. It was of Robert Clive that he thought, as he halted on the hill-top, tired, but hardly knowing that he was tired—every physical sensation lost in the passion of his mind.

The history of Clive and the making of British India had been a favourite subject with Mr. O'Brien. "If Clive wasn't an Irishman he ought to have been one," the Curate said, and he told his pupil of that wild and restless spirit, brave to audacity, the boy who was a dunce at school, and a clerk in an office, who had twice snapped a loaded pistol at his head to end a life that was hateful, and who on the second failure told himself that he was meant for greatness.

"He had known that all along," Godwin said. "He knew it when he climbed the steeple."

He thought of Clive to-day as he went down the hill, and left the high road, to plunge into the long rides.

The camp was on the border of the Romsey Road, not more than a mile and a half from Lyndhurst. They would shift to higher ground perhaps in a day or two—and the walk to Southampton would be longer. Happily two or three miles on the wrong side made very little difference to Godwin. Those long, thin legs of his had muscles that exercise had hardened to iron.

It was dusk when he came to the encampment and Mrs. Merritt's van. Peggy was asleep on her straw bed in a sheltered nook between two beeches, and grey smoke was curling up into the pale evening sky from the van chimney, while savoury odours indicated that Sarah was preparing supper; a less frugal meal than usual, since no such appetising fumes arose from the bread and cheese of every day.

Godwin was seized with a sudden feeling of intense melancholy as he looked at the brown tents and the gipsy fires, the pictur-

esque figures grouped about, the pony and the dogs, and the open door of the familiar van, through which he saw the glitter of bright copper saucepans hanging against the wall—the warmth of colour from the crimson curtains—the homely brightness which a clever housewife can make even in a home on wheels. A pang shot through his heart as he saw the snug shelter of infancy and childhood, the narrow prison-house of the ambitious boy. Love had made the prison-house dear. And he was going to forsake that home of love at the bidding of a master with a scornful countenance and a harsh voice, who offered him a starvation wage, not to be an actor, but a drudge in a theatre, where his only reward was to look on while other men acted.

The glamour had faded from the stage-life before he left Mr. Conroy's sitting-room—and only wild visions of future glory had kept up his courage in the long tramp home; but now a dull despair came upon him, a sudden revelation of his own folly.

Mr. O'Brien had told him of the choice of Hercules. All at once he felt that he, Godwin, had taken the wrong road. And he had to tell his mother. There was the rub.

He told her frankly and bravely, before they had finished their supper of fried bacon and potatoes.

He told her the actual truth—all the hard things that the manager had said to him, and how he had sold himself, body and bones, to the theatre for ten shillings a week.

"Don't laugh at me, mother."

"Laugh!" cried Sally, with a strangled sob, "I ain't likely to do that."

"It's the sum you named—ten shillings. I thought you'd think it funny."

"No, Monkey, I don't see the fun."

She was crying now without concealment.

"Oh, mother, my dear, dear, dear mother!"

He had thrown himself on his knees beside her, and was crying himself, with his face hidden in her lap. Only for a minute; and then he held up his head and smiled at her.

"You mustn't fret, mother dear. I shall only be ten or twelve miles off, and I shall get up early on Sunday mornings, and walk to the camp, wherever it is—and stay with you all day, and sleep in my own bed on Sunday night, and get back to the theatre before eleven o'clock on Monday morning. The walk will do me good, after being in a town all the week. And I shall live upon the ten shillings very comfortably. I can get a bedroom cheap, in a

house near the theatre. I shall cost you nothing, dear, when I'm once started."

And then he had, with shame and sorrow, to tell her that it must cost her something to start him; and he recited some of the things Mr. Conroy had named.

She seemed to know all about them.

"Of course you'll have to get things," she said, "lots of things, if you are ever to get respectable business. But you can't buy them in Southampton. There are only three or four shops in London where you could get them."

"The stage-manager is to tell me all about it," Godwin said drearily.

The gateway to the paradise of his dreams seemed beset with dragons.

"And he's to show me where to find a cheap lodging."

"He may do that. But he won't show you where to buy tights and russet boots, and black velvet shoes, in Southampton—not if he was fifty stage-managers. And when are you to begin?"

"Monday-week."

"And this is Friday. Not much time for getting things. Oh, how I wish you were going to be apprenticed to the carpenter! But perhaps he'd ask you to buy a plane, or a saw, before he'd let you start."

"A carpenter! I'd rather drown myself."

She flung her arms round his neck, and held him as if she thought he might rush out of the van, and run through the darkness to some deep pool in the Forest river.

"You are going to be an actor," she said, hugging him. "And you will be a great actor some day—greater than John Kemble. Don't be down-hearted, Monkey. It's uphill work, and a stony road all the way; but we'll get along it somehow, you and me."

"And I shall always be with you on Sundays, wet or fine. We shan't be parted."

"No, Godwin, we won't be parted. You've never been away from me for a night since I held you in my arms when you were an hour old."

"It'll be only six nights. I shall be here on the seventh, in my own old bed, seeing the stars while I lie awake, hearing the birds talking to each other before dawn."

They sat late into the night, and all that Sally said about her boy's future showed an intimate knowledge of the actor's



profession that astonished Godwin. She seemed to know almost as much as Mr. Conroy ; but she did not take quite such a gloomy view. There were flashes of hope in all her talk, flashes that lighted a distant future.

Godwin was to keep his appointment with the stage-manager, and to hear what he had to say about the accessories to the wardrobe of the theatre—those cotton-velvet tunics, and trunks and jackets, square-cut coats and embroidered waistcoats, that were at the service of all the actors. He was to hear how the things would be got in so short a time, and what they would cost ; and then his mother was to see what she could do.

## CHAPTER V

THE stage-manager was an energetic little man with a head of grey hair that stood on end, being close-shorn to accommodate a variety of wigs. He was second low-comedian and second old man as well as stage-manager, and was one of the hardest workers in that dramatic hive. He had joined Mr. Conroy's troupe at a low salary, with the idea that it was a school for the drama, from which he would speedily work his way to the London stage ; but he had spent seven years in the dusty old play-house with no further change than an autumn season at the Theatre Royal, Winchester, where Mr. Conroy was also lessee ; and he knew he was farther off from London than when he made his first appearance.

He was a cheery soul in spite of his disappointments, for he had fallen into the provincial actor's happy frame of mind, was contented to come back to the same lodgings season after season, and put on the same red wig, and act the same part in the same broad farce, in the same old comedy, content that his " screw " was just enough to pay for his lodging and his meals ; and for rather more sixpenny ale and fourpenny porter than was good for him. As time went by his idea of luxury or self-indulgence had resolved itself into that one question, enough beer. He wanted beer while he was acting ; he wanted beer when the night's work was done ; and he wanted beer between his breakfast and the eleven o'clock rehearsal ; and more beer before the rehearsal was over.

This gentleman, whose name was Rowsell, received Godwin kindly, and after offering to share a pint of half-and-half with him at the public-house next the theatre, and being refused, told him that he'd be thirstier before he'd been long in the profession, and then conducted him across the street to a general-shop nearly opposite the theatre, above which there were two floors of lodgings much esteemed by the humbler members of the company. " The bigwigs live in St. Michael's Square, and in some of the bettermost houses Above Bar ; but Endell's has always been a favourite with the small fry, and you

may get a bedroom on the top floor for five shillings a week. It won't be much of a room, but it will be clean, and you'll find no unpleasant company—and that's something to be said for it."

"I can't pay more than four shillings," said Godwin, "I'm to get only ten shillings a week; and I must have six for my food."

Mr. Rowsell gave a long, low whistle.

"No private means?"

"Not a sixpence."

"Well—— You'll have to cut it uncommon close. Are you a teetotaller?"

"I can be, when it's necessary. I don't care much what I eat—and I can drink water."

"You'll have to. Well, perhaps Mrs. Endell will strain a point, and let you have a room for four bob—if she's got one empty. But it's odds she's full. There's three of the company on the first floor. It's a bigger house than it looks. You couldn't be better off anywhere, for you're close to the theatre, and you'll be able to carry your bundle—instead of giving somebody sixpence a week to carry it for you."

Mrs. Endell proved obliging. She had a bedroom on the top floor, suitable for a bachelor; and she had also a front sitting-room vacant, with a small bedroom opening out of it, very convenient for a single lady—or would even do for a married couple; but for this superior suite she required eight shillings.

She had let to "theatricals" for many years, and she liked them; which was more than every landlady in Southampton would own to. She was a clean-looking matron, with an honest face; and the attic to which she conducted Godwin looked as clean as her cap and apron, though the furniture could not have been poorer, and it had none of the ornamental graces of the van—the black velvet kittens, the coloured prints of George the Third and the opening of London Bridge, mural decorations which had seemed lovely to Godwin's childish eyes, and which he still loved for old sake's sake. The room was clean, and Mrs. Endell pointed with pride to the prospect from the dormer-window, where, by standing on tiptoe, Godwin could see the blue water shining far away across a wilderness of chimneys and steep, red roofs. To eyes that had looked on the green distances of forest glades, the wide expanse of moor and hill, that glimpse of the Solent seemed a poor thing. But what could it matter to Godwin, who would be in Southampton to act, not to look out of windows? Mrs. Endell demurred a good deal to the notion of

four shillings for a room which she had never let for less than five, and for which she had sometimes received six—but something in the strange beauty of the boy's face touched her motherly heart, and she clapped him on the shoulder and said kindly :

"Well, it shall be four shillings for you; and I hope you'll stop with me till the theatre closes. But you mustn't want much waiting on; for it's a long way up for the girl's legs, and what with Mr. and Mrs. Fortescue, with their young family, and Madmerzel Mariani, the dancer, on the first floor, there is about as much as one pair of legs can manage."

This was all mysterious to Godwin, unschooled in the ways of landladies, but Mr. Rowsell helped him through.

"This youngster won't trouble you," he said; "he has got legs of his own, and all he'll want from your establishment is to cook his bit of dinner, when he doesn't get it from the cook-shop—and there's a good one near the bottom of the street—and boil the water for his tea. He doesn't take beer, so I suppose he's a tea-drinker."

"Yes, if I can afford to buy tea," Godwin said, wondering whether that luxury would come within the possibilities of a shilling a day—nay, not quite a shilling, as something would have to be pinched off to pay his laundress.

Never had a lad of fifteen begun life upon a pittance with less knowledge of the details that make the sum of existence; but he had a splendid courage, and a determination to face all the dragons in his path.

"Now that's settled, come along and look after those props of yours," said Rowsell, as he ran down the queer old staircase. Nobody knew how old that ramshackle house over Endell's shop might be—but the spaciousness of the building and the thickness of the walls, and the ponderous beams of cherry-wood and oak that still showed the rough mark of the axe suggested the days of the Plantagenets. Godwin had never heard of "props" in relation to stage apparel; but he asked no questions, and went where the comedian took him, which was by a short cut from French Street into Bugle Street, where Mr. Rowsell knocked at the bright green door of a superior-looking corner house.

"Tip-top lodgings, sitting-room and bedroom, twelve and six a week," he explained while they waited. "You see this poor chap had a bit of money. . . . I believe Dalmayne expects me," he said to the woman who opened the door.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Dalmayne is waiting for you."



She opened the parlour door, and announced, "Mr. Rowsell and a young gentleman," and Godwin found himself face to face with a sandy-haired youth, almost as long and lank as himself; but, oh, the distance between the pale eyes and receding chin of the youth who called himself Dalmayne, and Godwin's clean-cut features and great dark eyes! One countenance so weak and undefined, the other so keen and full of character.

"I've brought the young gentleman to have a look at those 'props' of yours which you think you have no future use for," Rowsell said.

"No, I've done with the d——d profession," replied the youth, in a grumbling voice. "I've had a sickener. The agent who engaged me for your dirty hole told me it was the finest dramatic school in the provinces—and that it was worth any young man's while to take a beggarly salary for the sake of playing a round of business under Conroy. Well, I've had enough of the school, and too much of the schoolmaster. I don't believe there's another manager in England who could sicken a young fellow's heart as Conroy has sickened mine. If you're going to step into my shoes, young chap," turning almost fiercely upon Godwin, "I can tell you that you'll wish yourself out of 'em before you've been at it a week."

"Oh no he won't," said Rowsell. "He's an ambitious lad, and he knows he must rough it, if he wants to get on."

"Do you suppose *I* wasn't ambitious?" Mr. Dalmayne demanded, with asperity, and then relaxed into his lachrymose tone. "Rough it! yes; I was willing to rough it, but not to be insulted in the presence of the company, told I was a stick and an ass, and should never make an actor if I lived to be a hundred!"

"Conroy is a disappointed man; and has a nasty trick of blurting out the truth."

"All I wanted was encouragement," whined Dalmayne. "After playing Romeo with triumphant success as an amateur at the little theatre at Pentonville, was it likely I should relish being sent on for the footman in 'John Bull,' or the sentinel in 'Richard the Third'?"

"'Stand back, my lord, and let the coffin pass,' is rather a fine line," murmured the comedian, with his tongue in his cheek.

"Oh, don't be witty about it. I've been very badly treated."

"Well, if you don't want to take those things of yours back to

London I thought you and my young friend here might do a deal, that's to say if you don't open your mouth too wide."

"He may have them for half what they cost me. I gave a lot of money for them. A maiden aunt of mine left me a nice little fortune, two hundred and fifty pounds; and when I came into it I was fool enough to leave a good berth in a solicitor's office to go upon the stage. I'd made a hit in 'Romeo,' and friends, whose judgment I could rely upon, told me I was a born actor; so instead of investing my capital, which would have given me just twenty pounds a year for life, I wasted half of it making a start on the stage. Well, there the things are, ready for you to look at, and, if you buy them off me, I hope they'll make you happier than they've made me," concluded Mr. Dalmayne, throwing open the door that led to his bedroom, into which he ushered Godwin and his companion.

Carefully spread out upon the clean counterpane, and displayed on adjacent chairs, Godwin beheld some essential elements in a stage wardrobe: a pair of russet boots, bucket-shaped, with red morocco tops; white cambric shirts with lace collars and ruffles, usually described as ballet-shirts; lace cravats; a sword in a red velvet sheath; and a sword-belt trimmed with cheap gold lace. Three pairs of long stockings, black, red, and white, those mysterious things that the manager had spoken of as "tights," were hung upon chairs—and on the dressing-table there appeared a black velvet hat with a sham diamond buckle and a white ostrich feather, over which the sandy youth hung fondly, touching it with his forefinger.

"My Romeo hat," he murmured; and then with a change of mood, "The things were bought regardless of expense—and they must have cost me twenty pound," he said almost savagely, "but you may have the whole kit for five quid. I'll never set my foot on the stage again. Not if I was asked to play Romeo at the 'Lane.'"

There were black velvet shoes as well as the boots—Romeo shoes.

"You're about Dalmayne's height," said Rowsell, looking at Godwin; "your foot ought to be about his size."

Nature had been in error, for the shoes, when tried on, proved two inches too long for the novice's neat foot, a narrow foot with an arched instep. "Oh, my eye, and Betty Martin!" exclaimed the comedian, as he looked at it. "Well, the shoes are a trifle roomy for you, and I suppose the boots will be the same," he said, "but it's a fault on the right side, and you'll be

lucky to get such a fine lot of properties for a five-pun note. I know what they'd cost you if you had to go to Bow Street for them, and I can tell you it's a bargain."

"Just throwing them away," said Mr. Dalmayne, putting on the Romeo hat, and taking a last enraptured look at himself in the glass.

"Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness," said the comedian, and then to Godwin, "Well, my boy, is it a bargain? Going, going, gone!" He rapped the bedpost with his walking-stick, by way of encouragement.

"I don't know if I can spend as much as five pounds," said Godwin dolefully, "but"—turning to the owner of the goods—"I'll let you know by the day after to-morrow, if that will do."

"You must let me have the cash before Saturday," said Romeo, taking off the hat and tenderly smoothing the feather, "or I may lose my temper and chuck them on to the fire."

"Or sell them to somebody else," suggested the comedian. "There's two or three young fellows in the company who would jump at such a bargain."

He had no base thought of a commission, but he looked for some advantage in the way of beer, perhaps free beer in the dressing-room every night till Dalmayne's departure. Godwin was grave and firm. He had no money of his own, but he thought his mother would buy the things for him, if they were really necessary for an actor.

"They're indispensable. And so you've got a mother, and she knows you're out?" said Rowsell. "You ain't running away from home to go on the stage, as some of us do."

"My mother is too kind to oppose me, when my heart is set upon anything," Godwin answered rather sadly. "Five pounds is a lot of money."

"What about twenty, chucked clean away?" whimpered Romeo.

"But I mean to live upon my salary, and cost her nothing when I am an actor."

"And be of no help to her," he thought sadly, when he had left Bugle Street, and was walking by the river, towards Redbridge.

He would cut no more clothes-pegs, weave no more mats or baskets, nor go about with her in the van, to lead Peggy over rough bits of road while his mother trudged beside him, nor keep her accounts, nor help her in many other little details of her trade. All that humble, happy industry was at an end, now that he had taken the first step on the thorny path to greatness.

He was back among the brown tents early that evening, and he and his mother had their tea in a nook among the gorse and holly, a real gipsy tea. She was as kind as ever, and she talked cheerfully of the theatre and his prospects, asking him many questions, and hugged and kissed him when he told her what a cheap lodging he had got, and that he would never cost her anything after the dreadful expense of his start.

"My poor boy, five pounds isn't much," Sally said cheerily. "A lady I knew would give as much for a leghorn bonnet. You shall have the money. We'll start you on the stage like a gentleman, even if you have to play small parts. You'll make your own way by and by, Monkey, as others have done; but it's uphill work."

He tramped back to Southampton next day, with five sovereigns in his pocket. He was getting to know the long high-road as well as the Forest pathways where he had recited the speeches he loved; but somehow this road, though it took him through smiling pastures, and by nice old houses in well-kept gardens, and old Gothic churches, and cheerful villages, had begun to make him melancholy. With every mile he travelled along it there went the thought that his Forest life was ending, and that he and his mother might never be quite so happy again.

"I shall be with her always on Sundays," he had to say to himself for comfort, very often in those long journeys. He found Mr. Rowsell, not at the theatre, but next door, in the humble tavern called the "Prince of Wales's Feathers," and spoken of as "The Feathers," where he might always be inquired for, and generally with success.

The comedian was pleased to take his young friend to Bugle Street, where he walked straight to the parlour, front doors being rarely shut in the Southampton of those days, except against bad weather.

Mr. Dalmayne was lying on the sofa, smoking a clay pipe. He had done with the hopeless poring over a badly written manuscript, copied in a hurry from the prompter's play-book. He had no more indifferent parts to cram into his feeble memory. Never more would he be obliged to inform an arrogant Tom Shuffleton that his horse was waiting for him in the avenue, nor to interpose his halberd in the path of a fiery crook-back king. He was leaving the stage. It would be impossible to infuse greater dignity into those words than Mr. Dalmayne did.

"You oughtn't to leave us without a week of farewell performances," Rowsell said gravely.



"I should have liked to show them what I could do with Romeo, if they were an appreciative audience," said the young man, "but as I look upon them as something lower than swine, I'd rather vanish in silence. They'll know my value better when I'm gone."

"It'll be a melancholy performance on Monday evening," said Rowsell. "However, here's your young friend, with his five quid, and you must say he has come up to time in honourable style."

There seemed some faint solace in the gold, for Dalmayne smiled as he slipped the sovereigns into his pocket.

"You might send for a pot of sixpenny, and three penn'orth of seedy biscuits," suggested Rowsell. "My young friend must feel parched after his walk, though, by the way," he added, turning to Godwin, "I know no more where you're come from than if you'd dropped from the moon; but I can see by your shoes that you've had a long trudge."

Godwin gave no information, but protested that he did not want beer, a protest unheeded, the bell having been rung, and "the girl" being now dispatched for the cakes and ale, over which refreshment, consumed chiefly by Rowsell, it was arranged that the things Godwin had paid for should be sent across to Endell's, and harboured in the attic where his tenancy was to begin on the following Monday. It was now Wednesday, and his first appearance would be made, most likely, on the evening of that Monday. Godwin flushed at the thought. How near it seemed!

"And what character shall I have to act?" he asked.

"Let me see? What shall we be doing next Monday?" Rowsell murmured meditatively; and then he named three plays that Godwin had never heard of.

"I dare say there'll be something for you in all of them," he said, "but I shan't cast them till Saturday. You must come to rehearsal on Saturday morning, and I shall be able to tell you all about it. Have you a good swallow?"

Godwin put his hand to his throat, bewildered.

"Can you learn your words easily?"

"I learnt Hamlet, and Othello, and Macbeth, and Shylock, and Cardinal Wolsey, and Richard the Third in a year."

"My Gawd!" cried the stage-manager. "Can you learn three parts of about twenty lines each between bed-time and rehearsal?"

"I dare say I can."

"Then you'll do. And remember that half the battle for a novice like you is to be letter-perfect at rehearsal. Fishing for words would spoil an embryo Garrick."

Godwin went to his attic, with Mrs. Endell's permission, and put away his new belongings in the chest of drawers—shabby, but substantial oak, and which only sloped forward rather uncomfortably on account of the slope in the floor, which was as undulating as a picturesque landscape.

Godwin looked round the room with wondering eyes. Measured by his sleeping berth in the van, it was a spacious apartment; but compared with his summer lodging in the woodland deep, where on every side stretched the vague distance of long green arcades, and over all the dark infinity of the midnight sky, this roomy garret was as narrow as a prisoner's cell.

He arranged his property in the drawers neatly and deftly, having learnt to be orderly in the van, where tidiness was as necessary as in a steward's cabin on a yacht. He told Mrs. Endell to expect him on the following Monday morning.

Any orders about his dinner? No. He would get his food from the shop Mr. Rowsell had shown him at the bottom of the street, and would give her no trouble, except to boil a kettle for his tea.

"I'll bring my own kettle," he said, and she was pleased with a lad who seemed more of a gentleman than the common run of "theatricals."

"You're new to the profession, I understand, sir," she said.

"Yes, I am to begin on Monday night."

"Well, sir, though I say it that shouldn't, you couldn't have done better—being a novice—than to come to my house. Mr. Fortescue, the light comedy gentleman, who has the best part of my first floor, is a beautiful actor, and as kind a heart as ever was, and he'll give you many a wrinkle, if he takes to you, as I'm sure he will. This is his third season in my rooms, and he's as friendly with me as if I was a blood relation. He always calls me aunt, when he hasn't some comic name for me. Mrs. Fortescue?—well, she's nice enough in her way, but she ain't his equal. She acts young heroines, if they haven't got much to say—and some of the second old women—but she'll never make an actress, not if she lives to be a hundred."

"Why not?" Godwin asked gravely. It hurt him to hear this homely shopkeeper dispose of any artist in such contemptuous fashion. Mrs. Fortescue, perhaps, was as ambitious as he

was, and meant to be a great actress. "Why not?" he repeated sharply.

"Because it isn't in her, sir. I don't pretend to be a judge of acting—but I know when it isn't in 'em."

"Perhaps you'll say it isn't in me."

"I don't think I shall, sir," said the matron, smiling at him. "You look every inch an actor. You've got the eyes. There was a lady here for two seasons, a comic lady. Oh, her eyes! Her beautiful eyes! She could keep the house alive with laughter every minute she was on the stage, but she's gone to America—more's the pity—and the singing-chambermaid they've got now ain't a patch upon her, though she gets two guineas a week, and has a first floor in the square."

Never had the Forest depths or the wide-reaching distances looked lovelier in Godwin's eyes than that September evening when he climbed the hill by Minstead village to Stony Cross, and went slowly down into the glen where Rufus was killed, and where the gipsy fires showed redly here and there among the green, while the sky above the great beech trees was still warm with the last light of the sunken sun. An inexpressible melancholy filled the boy's mind as he went down the hill, that terrible sense of something lost that comes with every new departure in life, the shadow that falls upon the unknown road, when the old way has to be left for ever—a road that seemed so fair while it was still far off, and now has suddenly darkened. Perhaps Godwin never realised what the Forest was to him till this evening, when he saw the brown tents and the friendly fires, and the ragged boys and girls leaping up to welcome him. He looked round at the familiar things with sad eyes.

The van was not there; though it was later than his mother's usual hour of return from her village round.

"Has mother gone to Lymington?" he asked Ephraim, the gipsy, who sat, smoking his short black pipe, beside the fire where savoury odours of supper escaped from the iron pot that hung above the embers.

"No, it's Southampton to-day, I think."

"Southampton? When did she start?"

"Ten o'clock this morning."

"I wonder she didn't overtake me. Oh, here she is," as Peggy came winding slowly down the hill, her mistress leading her, and the van rolling about a good deal in the descent. Godwin ran to meet her.

"Mother, why didn't you tell me you were going to Southampton?"

"Never mind, dear. I had business there. I meant to tell you when it was done."

Nothing more was said till the van was stationed a little way from the gipsy fires, and Peggy had been taken out of the shafts, and tethered in a sheltered spot. Sally had a couple of old blankets, that were hung up on each side of the mare, to keep the wind off, as well as the old horse-cloth that was put over her when she lay down for the night. Peggy had always been treated like a friend by Mrs. Merritt and her son.

"Only a cold supper to-night, Monkey. I've brought a bit of German sausage and a home-made loaf from S'thampton."

They had clambered into the van, and Sally was lighting a candle. Godwin stared about him, wondering. The van looked different somehow. The old cosy air was gone! The kittens had gone, and the pictures, King George the Third and the Opening of London Bridge. The van looked empty without those embellishments.

"What's become of the black velvet kittens? You haven't sold them?" Godwin asked, with alarm.

It occurred to him that a customer might have taken a fancy to those ornaments of his home.

"No, I've not sold the kittens. Eat your supper, Monkey, and then I'll tell you all about it."

"About what?"

"What I've been doing in S'thampton."

"Oh, mother, it must have been something dreadful—you look so sad."

Godwin had been enjoying the home-made loaf and the foreign sausage; but appetite and relish left him all at once. The sadness in his mother's tone scared him; and that vague melancholy which had possessed him as he came down the hill in the twilight became an aching pain.

"Mother, what's the matter? What have you been doing to the van? It looks bare and strange, and I miss things, the pictures, the ornaments."

"They're all safe, dear, safe at S'thampton. I've sold the van. Don't be upset. I've sold it for a fair price, and I shall never regret it."

"And Peggy? Oh, mother, you haven't sold Peggy?"

"Yes, dear, Peggy's sold with the van; but she'll have a good master. I'd have taken her to the kennels, sooner than



sell her to be ill-treated. I've sold her to one of the van gipsies, Uncle Ephraim's brother—a prosperous man. She'll be better off than with us."

"Why did you do it? Oh, mother, why did you do it?"

"Because my life is going to be different now, Monkey. I'm going to live in S'thampton, or in any other town where our fortune may take us. I've taken a sitting-room and bedroom over the shop in French Street. We shan't be parted, Godwin. Oh, you foolish boy, did you think I was going to let you go about the world alone, with not a mortal to look after you, you that I've taken care of since you were born—you that won't be sixteen till December?"

"Oh, mother, why did you do it? I should have been with you every Sunday, and you would have been happy going about among your old customers, and they all so fond of you! and you doing so well, and saving money and having such good health! What will you do in Southampton—in a house—in a street?"

"Take care of you. Don't fret, Godwin. It had to be. From the time you set your heart on the stage I could see the end of our gipsy-life. Don't take on so, my dear."

Godwin was sobbing, with his elbows on the little table, where plate and glass had been pushed aside, and his face hidden in his clasped hands.

"Don't cry. Peggy will have a good master. She'll be happy. And you'll be a great actor some day."

"But it may be years and years before that time comes. Mr. Conroy laughed at me when I talked of acting Hamlet. I thought I could wait; but I thought you'd be happy in your van in the woods, in the sweet air, among people who are fond of you. You'll mope and die in that close street, where the houses look as if they were coming down on one's head. It won't matter for me. I shall be in the theatre, acting, and I shall be happy. But you, mother! Oh, why did you do it?"

"It had to be," she answered gravely, with brimming eyes. "I took to the woods for your sake, my dear; and I can go back to the town for your sake."

"I should have been with you every Sunday—all Sunday, mother."

"And you'd have tired yourself to death, walking twenty to thirty miles between Saturday night and Monday's rehearsal, and the other actors would have found out that your mother lived in a van, and sold brooms and baskets. It wouldn't have

done, dear. You shall start fair. You shall have a cosy parlour to sit in after your work, and you shall have proper food, not cagmag from the cook-shop; and if they want to laugh at you for having your mother travelling about with you—for we shan't be always in Southampton—like a young lady, you can tell them that I am a widow, and you are my only child; and so it's natural for me to make my home with you. I shall get on comfortably, never fear; and I shall sit in the front every night when you're acting. There's always room for near relations in the upper boxes."

Godwin stretched out his hand to clasp hers, too deeply moved for speech.

He had yet to learn the paralysing influence of a near relation in the upper boxes.

There was no more to be said. Mother and son lay awake for the greater part of the summer night, and even the delicious atmosphere of early morning could not give Godwin the bliss of forgetfulness. The parting with Peggy, and his mother's sacrifice of things she had always liked, weighed on him like a heavy burden. It was the first time he had laid himself down under a load of care. Before the birds began to twitter in the branches he had almost wished that he were going to be apprenticed to the carpenter at Lyndhurst. And for one minute, in the silence before dawn, he thought of a moving sermon of Mr. O'Brien's, and of One who had been a carpenter, and had worked in meek obedience to His father and mother till He was thirty years old. His pillow was wet with tears before that vision faded.

Morning came, and he was up, and dressed, and hanging round Peggy's neck. It was Saturday, and he had to make an early start for Southampton, for this was the day on which Mr. Rowsell was to tell him in what plays he would have to act on Monday. His mother would follow, and would get a lift in a friend's cart at least as far as Totton.

"Don't worry about me, my dear. I shall be there early enough to get a bit of dinner for you by two o'clock," she said, as she put his basket before him on the clean deal table. She had a basin of coffee and a plate of bread and butter ready for him, early as it was—and when he had finished his meal, eating and drinking to please his mother, rather than for appetite, she said:

"You must come and say good-bye to your friends, Godwin. There's one in particular I want you to see."

"Uncle Ephraim?"

"Yes, him of course ; and old Elspeth. She was always fond of you."

The gipsies were all astir, and all distressed at the parting ; while Uncle Ephraim frankly told Godwin that he was a fool for leaving the comforts and privileges of a wandering life for the hardships and restraints of town lodgings. Old Elspeth took her pipe out of her mouth to say good-bye. She laid the little black pipe aside on the turf, when Sally bent over her and whispered something.

"Yes," said Elspeth, "I'd like to look into the stars for him. Give me your hand, boy. No, the left one."

She turned his palm upwards, and pored over it with a serious scrutiny, her keen black eyes intent under frowning brows. There was no question of crossing the palm with silver. It was the scrutiny of an old friend—not a professional wizard.

She traced the lines slowly with the tip of a brown forefinger. The line of the head, the line of the heart, the mount of Jupiter, the mount of Mercury, the mount of Venus. They were all there. Desbarrolles might know more, but he could not believe more than this gipsy did.

"Oh, what fortune !" she said. "Gold, gold, gold ! Success in all your undertakings. And the line of the heart ! What love, too much love !"

"Then it's a lucky hand ?" whispered Sally, breathless, with the hushed look of fear in her questioning face.

"Lots of luck, lots of luck," answered the gipsy ; but she was grave to sadness, tracing the line of life with her dark finger.

Godwin had started on his journey before she spoke again, and then, when Sally offered her a shilling, she pushed the coin away, and shook her head sorrowfully.

"I don't want to be paid," she said. "I was always fond of your boy."

"And you say it's a lucky hand ?"

"Luck ? Yes. There's different kinds of luck. Some of us think there's no such luck as to have lots of money. Yes, it's a lucky hand. How old are you, Sally Merritt ?"

"Forty-three next July."

"And he's not sixteen. Well, don't fret, friend. He may last your time."

"What do you mean ?"

"There's something more than gold in his hand."

"Oh, speak out, for God's sake !"

"There's death."

"An early death?"

"How can it be early? He's got to make his fortune first. That's written in the stars. Not early, but sudden," and then, dropping her voice to an awe-stricken whisper, "and bloody."

"I don't believe you," cried Sally, almost in a scream. "It's all humbug. You can't frighten me. It's all nonsense. When I see the gold I shall believe in the rest."

## CHAPTER VI

GODWIN was on the other side of the hill when Minster Church clock struck six. He walked across the Forest towards Emery Down, and skirted Lyndhurst racecourse, and turned his face towards the seaport where his destiny summoned him. The loss of the van and Peggy, the alteration in his mother's life, hung over him like a dark cloud. She had been cheerful, and had made light of difficulties; but in the depths of his consciousness he knew how hard it was for her to abandon that healthy life in which she had prospered ever since he could remember; while his own love of the Forest, and of his old companions the gipsies—which had slumbered while his mind was on fire with thoughts of Hamlet and Othello—had revived now that the old dear things were gone, and he knew that Hamlet and Othello were as far away as ever. The desperate step had been taken. The old life was spoilt; and he was still at the beginning of the new path, and everybody told him that it was full of brambles and thorns—rocky, rough, cruel.

It did not seem strewn with roses when he stood on the prompt side of the stage with Mr. Rowsell, who gave him three books, an old melodrama, a tragedy, and a farce, in each of which there was a part for the novice. But such a part! He turned the leaves and looked through the book without finding the Count Eglamore in which he was to make his debut. Rowsell had to point out the page, and the stage directions. "Enter Count Eglamore and others," and at the bottom of the page Rowsell showed him the first line that he was to speak before an audience: "The Duke murdered? Where is the villain?"

"It's a fine speech if you give it mouth," Rowsell said.

Overleaf nothing! In the next scene there was another entrance and another exclamation. Later, another line; and then no more.

"You're on all through the last act. It will accustom you to the lights. You must copy out your part, and let me have the book before three o'clock," added Rowsell.

"There's not much to copy," Godwin answered dejectedly.



"Don't be greedy. You'll get plenty to do by and by, if you can act."

The part in the tragedy was of the same calibre. He had to feed the hero with half-line interrogations, during a long scene. These were the kind of characters to which a lad with a soul on fire was to bend his mind for the next half-year.

"You'll get your chance in the farce," Rowsell said cheerily. "A screaming, comic footman. Can you stand on your head?"

Yes, Godwin could do that, and more. Anything that a fearless boy could do with his limbs had been done by Godwin, and he was as agile as a trained acrobat. Yet the question shocked him.

"I'll show you a bit of business that'll get a laugh, and might get you a round of applause," Mr. Rowsell told him. "It isn't exactly legitimate. In point of fact it's pure clowning; but I've never seen it fail. And now go home and copy your parts, and bring me the books directly you've done with 'em, not later than three o'clock, mind, and as much earlier as you can. My lodgings are in your street, the other side of the way, number forty-nine, next door but one to the 'Feathers.'"

Godwin obeyed, and took the books to "number forty-nine" at one o'clock, though he had to buy ink and paper and pens before he began. It was in the age of the spluttering quill, and that rough blue foolscap whereof the corrugated surface seemed to have been manufactured with a view to resisting the mark of the pen. Godwin was unacquainted with the mode and manner in which an actor's part should be written—but he got the lines copied somehow—and then, in no cheerful spirit, he took the shortest cut to the quay, and paced to and fro in front of the grey stone wall, learning his lines—first, Count Eglamore, and then "Sigismund, his friend" in the tragedy—and to speak those wretched scraps of prose he had to array himself in two distinct costumes, of picturesque splendour, knowing absolutely nothing of the laws of stage dress.

He was in the depth of depression when he went up the dark old staircase in French Street, but his mother was waiting for him in the little parlour. The door was open, and he saw her cheerful face as he came on the landing.

"Dinner's ready," she called briskly. "Where have you been?"

He told her what he had been doing. She was full of interest, wanted to know what he was going to act. He told her the names of the plays, and she seemed to know all about them, but she did

not remember Count Eglamore in the melodrama. "Sigismund, his friend," explained himself.

"That sort of part's never worth much," she said, "but you'll learn to walk the stage, and get accustomed to the lights."

And then she went into the question of costume. She had examined his purchase, and had busied herself in picking up stitches in the stockings.

"I can wash and iron your ballet-shirts on Monday morning," she said. "There's no doubt the 'props' were a bargain. Everything's good of its kind; but the boots and shoes must be too large for you."

"They are a trifle long, but I suppose they'll do," Godwin answered languidly.

What could it matter what a man's boots were like, if he had to speak only half a dozen lines? The bucket boots with red heels and tops lined with red morocco, which could be turned up for a bandit, and turned down under lace ruffles for a cavalier, had delighted him when he bought them; for these might have been worn by Richard the Third; but to-day he was wading in the slough of despond, so deep, that stilts, not boots, would seem to be his only wear.

It was a wonder to him that his mother should be so familiar with the details of stage costume, and should know something even of the parts he had to act.

"There's no call to make a secret of it," she said, when he expressed his surprise. "When I was in service with an actress I had to know everything about the theatre. It wasn't a bed of roses, I can tell you—hard work and late hours—and very little thanks, and my wages always behind-hand. I had to take 'em how I could, in dribs and drabs—money that didn't seem to do me any good—yet I saved, even at that."

"Was she a great actress?"

"Lord no, dear. She wasn't even a good actress; but she was a pretty woman, and she had her own ideas about making her fortune. *She* had plenty of money—only it came so easily that she used to let it run through her fingers like water. We won't talk about her, Monkey. She wasn't a good actress, and she wasn't a good woman. She had no more heart than a stone."

In Godwin's melancholy state of mind Monday came slowly. The revelation of his ignorance, his utter helplessness, filled him with despondency. He had discovered that the actor's art was not to be acquired by spouting Shakespeare in a woodland solitude, and that all manner of details had to be mastered outside the

region of dramatic poetry. To learn the five great tragedies by heart was nothing. He had to learn how to dress himself, how to paint his face. He wanted innumerable things that cost money: wigs—swords—stage-jewels—varieties of boots and shoes—a cross-handled sword for Shakespeare, a rapier for the old comedies.

"What should I have done without you, mother?" he cried, when Sally showed him the things he would have to wear, and told him how he must get the major part of his costume from the wardrobe of the theatre, and must take care that the wardrobe woman did not impose upon him.

"I wish I could see her for you," Sally cried, "but that wouldn't do. You mustn't be too much mothered. You'll have to take your own part."

"What should I have done without you?" Godwin repeated, and Sarah's honest countenance was irradiated with joy.

That little speech, so earnestly spoken, made up for everything. The sale of the van—the certain loss of her savings—everything was paid for by the boy's affection. She put her arms round his neck and kissed the pale brow under the loosely falling hair.

"It'll be uphill work, my dear, but we'll be patient. You'll be a famous actor some day, and sought after by the great folks—as John Philip Kemble is—and then, perhaps you'll be ashamed of your ignoramus of a mother."

"Ashamed!" Godwin's answer promised love that nothing could kill. Mrs. Merritt was not afraid—she knew the heart of her boy.

They had a restful Sunday, went to St. Michael's Church in the evening, the fine old church, which had something of the hush and spaciousness of a cathedral. While they were sitting quietly after their frugal supper, Godwin silent and melancholy, still under that dark cloud of disappointment which had fallen upon him after his first experience of the theatre, Sarah startled him by exclaiming suddenly:

"You must have a name, dear—a Christian name."

"Wasn't I christened Godwin?"

"Yes, but that'll be your surname now."

"But what is my surname?"

"We'll make it Godwin," she answered, with a touch of defiance; "but you must have two names, like other people. The King's is a good name. We'll make your Christian name George. George Godwin! A good name for the bill—though, after all,

Mr. Godwin would be quite enough for that. But when the actors get friendly they'll want to call you by your Christian name."

Monday night came, and Godwin made his *début* as Count Eglamore.

It was a somewhat lively *début*, though not calculated to put the novice in good spirits.

He certainly made an impression. He heard a woman in the front of the pit exclaim, "Look at his legs!" before he had reached the middle of the stage, and he knew that the word was passed round, and attention focussed upon those long thin legs, before he spoke his first line.

The whole pit laughed at his legs. He was wearing scarlet tights—and to those ribald minds the skinny legs suggested twin sticks of sealing-wax. The pit tittered, the gallery guffawed, and the audience having been thus put in a lively mood by his legs, laughed unrestrainedly at his first speech.

Heaven knows why they laughed. Godwin never knew. A provincial audience is pitiless to youth and inexperience. A battered old mummer, who can bellow and swagger, may command the favour of pit and gallery; but refinement, grace, even beauty cannot save a novice from derision, if his acting fail to satisfy an unlettered audience.

No one in that theatre noticed the beauty of the long oval face, the wonderful eyes. They only saw a thin, overgrown lad. They only heard an unaccustomed voice.

It was a night of humiliation for the son on the stage, and for the fond mother watching and listening in a back row of the upper boxes—where there was room and to spare for the actors' relations.

Godwin met the lessee as he was leaving the theatre.

"I don't want to discourage you, young man," Mr. Conroy said, with mock urbanity: "but of all the incapable novices I've seen, you're an easy first."

Godwin made no answer. He wondered what Conroy had been like at the beginning of his career, being so vile an actor at his maturity. Sally tried to comfort her boy with loving words, and a hot supper. But Godwin could not eat. He was heart-broken; and his mouth was hot and dry. It had been parched and feverish since his first speech, and the laughter that blighted him. They had laughed at the first line, and they had laughed at the second. The wretched little speeches came at long intervals. He spoke too little for the audience to get accustomed to all

that was strange in his voice. It came upon them every time as a surprise. If that cruel laughter agonised him, Sarah Merritt had endured no less an agony in the upper boxes, where she was sitting behind Mrs. Fortescue, the light comedian's wife, who tittered every time Godwin spoke, and whispered about him disparagingly to the friend she had brought with her. Yet, even after this dismal experience, she maintained a show of cheerfulness.

"It will all come right by and by," she told her son. "You haven't got your voice at the right pitch, perhaps, and a Monday night audience is always noisy and disagreeable. You'll do better to-morrow. You've got a good part in the farce. You'll be able to make them laugh as the tipsy footman."

"I made them laugh to-night," said the boy drearily. "Did you hear them laugh at my legs?"

"We'll manage something for to-morrow night," Sarah said.

Things were a shade less dismal on the next night. Godwin had a sentimental part in the first piece which provoked mirth—but he made a hit as the drunken footman: and when he stood on his head, and followed a fine lady visitor to the door in that attitude, she stalking before him, unconscious and haughty, the gallery gave him his first round of applause.

Rowsell congratulated him when he came off the stage.

"Didn't I tell you that would get you a round?"

Mr. Conroy happened to be at the wing, and gave that comedian a civil nod.

"Broad farce is your line, youngster," he said. "Let us hear no more of Hamlet."

Varying experiences came after this. Southampton got accustomed to his voice and could hear him without derision. The nights when he was not laughed at were his successes. He went home happy, and talked gaily to his mother across the little supper-table, a round table with a clean white cloth upon it, and all things becoming. Wherever Sarah was, van or lodging, there was comfort.

In his secret thoughts Godwin regretted the van. He felt half suffocated in his attic, with only the one small casement to let in the air, remembering the open door and the long moonlit glade, or the wide sweep of the moor, and all the deep blue heaven and company of stars that he had looked out upon when he lay awake in the summer midnight. He missed the melancholy note of the owl in the darkness, and the chirruping of young birds before dawn, the coo of the wood-pigeon, the bell of the deer:



sounds lost to him for ever, he thought. He took no pleasure in his success in broad farce, in which, somehow, he was always approved. Conroy and the actors might say what they liked: the audience might laugh at him in every sentimental part. Come what might, he meant to be a tragic actor. That was written in the stars, as old Elspeth would have said. No discouragement, no humiliation could crush him. Heart-broken to-night, he took courage to-morrow, and he sprang out of his narrow bed alert and determined, crying:

"This is I. Hamlet the Dane!"

The first success that seemed to him to count for a step forward on the stony pathway came as a surprise to the old actors, who had treated him in some not quite unkindly way as a joke.

He was cast for the savage brother in the melodrama of "Valentine and Orson." There was a scene where he came back to his den and found the she-bear, his foster-mother, had been killed. His grief in this scene, the love and anguish expressed in wordless passion, his wild shriek of agony when he realised that the creature he loved was dead—and the dumb despair in which he hung over the beast, fondling and kissing the rough head, as if trying to warm it back to life—belonged to the highest order of dramatic art. For him it mattered nothing that the bear was a clumsy creature, composed of a supernumerary inside a moth-eaten bearskin. For him the pathos of the scene was real, and his acting roused the house: and for the first time he felt what it was to have an audience with him.

The lessee was not by to see his triumph, but the stage-manager, Rowsell, clapped him on the back in hearty approbation.

"That was a fine bit of pantomime, my boy. I didn't think it was in you."

"I am fond of animals," Godwin said simply. His face—made up for the savage with brown and red paint—was washed clean with his tears when he came off the stage.

Sarah was crying like a child in the upper boxes, and received her son with rapture when he went home.

"I knew you were a genius," she said. "And now there's others that know it."

After this the audience became more indulgent, and the laugh of derision was no longer his portion.

Jack Bond, the leader of the orchestra, a clever, kindly creature of the true Bohemian type, gave him praise and encouragement.

"You've a fine voice, my boy," he said; "but there's something wrong in your way of producing it. Can you sing?"

"I don't know."

"That's what the young man said when he was asked if he could play the fiddle. Come round to my lodgings to-morrow afternoon, and we'll soon find out."

"Can you sing?" Sarah repeated when her son told her of Mr. Bond's question. "Of course you can sing. Why, there isn't one of the gipsy songs that you didn't pick up and sing better than the best of them."

Godwin spent an hour in the leader's parlour in Bugle Street on the following afternoon, and when he had sung the scale, ascending and descending, to Mr. Bond's fiddle, from the lower G to A natural in the treble, that gentleman told him that he had a fine tenor voice, and that he might do better by getting himself trained as a ballad-singer, than by slaving at "general utility" in a provincial theatre.

"I mean to be an actor," Godwin told him, unmoved by his praise. "If I can sing it will be useful when I play Iago. That's all I care about."

"You'd come to your own quicker, and make six times as much money if you went in for singing. You could play Tom Tug. If you'll come round to-morrow I'll teach you his two songs. You could play Harry Bertram with as many songs as you like. Wouldn't that be acting enough for you?"

"No," the boy answered doggedly. "I want to play Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth."

"You're a fool," said Jack Bond. "Think of Incledon! There never was actor living who could move an audience as he can."

Godwin thanked the friendly fiddler, but left Bugle Street unconvinced.

His one success as Orson helped him to bear many rebuffs. The knowledge that his singing voice was good sustained him when the audience laughed at his speaking voice, which they did occasionally, even after his success in broad farce had made him something of a favourite with the gallery.

The season in the seaport town was a long one. He had time to get used to the theatre, and to feel that the lodging over the general shop was almost as good a home as the van.

He went through the rough and tumble of a young actor's apprenticeship. He was told that he was like a young bear with all his troubles to come; though it seemed to him that no trouble in the future could ever equal the anguish of his first night in that theatre. He acted anything he was told to act—all the most

ignominious characters in old-fashioned tragedy and comedy, the characters whose stilted sentimentality invited ridicule—and sometimes by a sudden necessity found himself jumped into some part of greater importance. When Laertes fell ill and had to be replaced at a few hours' notice, it was Godwin who had to go on for that character without a rehearsal, Mr. Rowsell remembering how the boy had said he knew the whole play by heart: and, for the same reason, it was Godwin who was shuffled into a suit of armour and sent on for the ghost, when the buried Majesty of Denmark had been discovered sitting before his looking-glass in the actor's dressing-room, feebly smearing his face with the wrong pigment, in an advanced stage of intoxication.

Godwin was the manager's jack-of-all-trades, and the most economical engagement Mr. Conroy had ever made.

The fencing contest in the last act of "Hamlet" had naturally to be cut short when the novice went on for Laertes; but on the next day Godwin took counsel with his now greatest friend, Jack Bond, and they went together to call upon a retired sergeant of fusiliers, who kept a little public-house near the river, and with Mr. Bond's assistance Godwin entered into a compact with the *ci-devant* soldier, who agreed to teach him fencing for the modest honorarium of a shilling for a half-hour lesson, twice a week. This would mean two shillings subtracted from the ten which Godwin handed to his mother every Saturday afternoon, and which just paid the rent of the lodgings, Sally having made such a bargain with Mrs. Endell as nobody else had ever achieved.

For all expenses beyond rent, Mrs. Merritt drew upon her little store, which consisted of some small savings, and the money she had received for Peggy and the van. It seemed a substantial nest-egg when she placed it in the Southampton Bank, and the cheque she cashed on the first of every month was not a large one: but, in spite of the most rigid economy and a wonderful capacity for making shillings go as far as other people's half-crowns, she knew that her little capital was ebbing away, and that days of hardship might come for her and her boy.

Sarah did not grudge the weekly shillings for the fencing lessons. She wanted Godwin to be armed at all points.

"You must learn to fence, and you must learn to dance," she said cheerily. And not long after this she told him that she had been talking to Miss Mary Ann Smith, otherwise Mlle. Mariani, the *première* and only danseuse of the Theatre Royal, French Street, and had arranged that the young lady should

give him a dozen lessons in stage dancing, for a moderate fee, which was to include a shilling to the *répétiteur* for his services with his fiddle. She would teach him to walk a minuet with grace and distinction, to execute the sailor's hornpipe, the Highland fling, and a Spanish dance, in that course of twelve lessons. She could have the stage any day after rehearsal——It would be hard work for her and for the pupil; but the young lady liked her art, and as she had been getting stouter than she wished to be, for lack of sufficient exercise, she would be glad to fine herself down before Christmas, and that crowning glory of the season, the pantomime, in which she would appear as Columbine.

"Goodness knows what kind of harlequin Mr. Conroy will get for me," she said. "Last year it was a beast who must have been at least fifty, and who was too fat to get through the trap, and perspired horribly, which was worse."

Godwin liked the dancing lessons, though not so much as he liked the fencing bouts in the backyard of the little pub. He learnt the stately movements of the minuet, and the quick steps in the hornpipe and the fling, without giving his instructress much trouble. His fine ear made it all easy for him. The *répétiteur's* fiddle taught him as much as the dancer's example.

She kept her word, and he was proficient in all those serviceable dances before the end of the lessons. Mr. Conroy, crossing the stage one Friday afternoon on the way to his treasury—a dingy little room at the back of the theatre—stopped to watch Godwin dancing the cachucha, and applauded him when he had done.

"So you are turning ballet-dancer," he said, in his rasping voice. "Stick to that, young gentleman. You're young and agile, and you'll do better at dancing than at Shakespeare."

This was base ingratitude on Mr. Conroy's part, seeing how Godwin's command of Shakespeare had helped the management out of difficulties. But gratitude is a virtue little known to theatrical managers.

Things had settled down, and life seemed pleasant again for Sarah Merritt and her son as the autumn darkened into winter, and often on a foggy afternoon that cheerful soul would remark that it was better to be living in French Street than in Canterton Glen. She had made herself at home in the theatrical lodging-house, and had struck up a friendship with Mrs. Fortescue, whom she had forgiven for her unkind criticism on the night of Godwin's *début*. How could Sarah do less than forgive her,

when she said that Tony, her husband, had a high opinion of Godwin, and believed that he would make a good low comedian, and be worth three pounds a week at a first-class theatre, such as York or Bath, by the time he was twenty.

"Don't let him make a mistake about it, Mrs. Merritt," Fortescue told Sarah, when they had become still more friendly, "the boy's line is low comedy, and he'll be always worth his salt while he can sing, and cut capers with those long thin legs. These youngsters all want to be tragedians. Liston did. Mrs. Orger was dying to play Juliet. But take my word for it, he'll find it's easier to make an audience laugh than to make them cry."

Tony was as great a favourite with his brother actors as he was with the pit and gallery; and when he took Godwin under his protection everybody was kind to the boy, whom the company had at first been disposed to make fun of, his ignorance of stage-craft laying him open to ridicule, while the seriousness which he showed in every detail of his work was decidedly uncongenial—the provincial actor of those days being of a lymphatic temper, with a supreme disdain for conscientiousness in art. To shuffle through three parts a night, somehow, sustained always by the aphorism that "twelve o'clock must come at last," to borrow a metaphor from the paper storms of the property room, and to say that if you can't snow white you must snow brown!—there being a tradition of a brown-paper snowstorm; to make light of all shortcomings, and never to take pains, composed the sum of the stroller's philosophy. To the choice spirits of the green-room, therefore, Godwin's grave intensity of purpose had been something to make fun of—and it was only when Fortescue praised the lad, and told his friends of the touching self-abnegation of his homely mother, that the actors adopted "the young un" as a worthy member of the company, and forbore to laugh at his aspirations, his voice, or his legs. The actresses had been more kind, and had adopted him from the first. They told each other that he was beautiful; and they told him that he would make his fortune in the juvenile lead by and by. He must play Romeo, Orlando, Ferdinand, Bassanio, and all the lovers. He would be sure to get on—but, kind as they all were, old and young, they could not break through Godwin's reserve. He would never talk about himself, except to reiterate that one unchangeable resolve. He was to be a tragedian, and nothing less.

It was still November when, urged by Mr. Fortescue, Godwin



approached the formidable lessee in his treasury, and asked for an increase of salary.

"I have been in your company three months, sir," he said. "I've worked hard; and I hope I've been useful. The money you give me only just pays for my lodgings."

"Indeed, Mr. Godwin? Pray what is your salary?" asked the manager, who had counted the ten shillings with his own well-born fingers every Saturday, so need scarcely have made the inquiry.

"Ten shillings a week for your lodgings!" he exclaimed, when Godwin named the sum; "ten shillings for a 'general utility' actor's room in a small town!"

"I have my mother with me. She left a comfortable home to come here, on my account."

"Your mother!—What can you want with a mother? You are not a girl. You don't require a duenna."

"My mother is my dearest friend, and my best," Godwin answered hotly. "I don't know what I should have done without her. She helps me in everything. She knows all about stage costume."

"Was she an actress?"

"No," said Godwin, and there was something in his utterance of the monosyllable that stopped further questioning.

"Well, young man, I don't mind owning that you have been useful on more than one occasion, as a stop-gap—and I should like to treat you handsomely. You want an increase of salary?"

"If you please, sir."

"How much?"

"I want fifteen shillings, the salary you gave Mr. Dalmayne."

"Now, look here, my lad, I'll do better than that. If you can get Miss Mariani to coach you, and can learn the dances and the business of harlequin between now and Christmas, I'll give you a pound a week from Boxing Day to the end of the season. You've the right kind of figure for harlequin. *You* won't stick in the trap."

Twenty shillings a week! But to act harlequin, a dancer, a pantomimist! For him whose dream was of Hamlet! There was degradation in the idea. Yet to be able to hand his mother a sovereign every Saturday! How could he refuse?

"Thank you, sir. Miss Mariani is very kind, and I dare say she will teach me harlequin's business."

"Of course she will. The fact is, Godwin, I believe she's rather sweet upon you. She'll like to have you for harlequin.

She's no chicken ; but she made a fuss last Christmas because I engaged a middle-aged gentleman. The man was an accomplished dancer, but somewhat fat and scant of breath."

Sarah Merritt was delighted with the advance of salary, and saw no evil in Godwin's appearance as harlequin.

"It will be all in your favour when you act the big parts," she told him. "It will give you lightness and grace. See how heavily Mr. Conroy moves. He'd be a better actor if he'd begun life in the ballet."

If Sarah was pleased, Mlle. Mariani was enchanted.

"I knew you had talent," she said, recognising only one kind of talent, the *terpsichorean*. "It was Conroy's seeing you that afternoon when he crossed at the back of the stage while we were dancing the *cachucha*. I saw him stand and watch us. He'll save two pound ten a week by his arrangement, and he won't give me sixpence for teaching you—but I don't care about that, dear. You'll make a beautiful harlequin—and I'll teach you to roll your head with the best of them. I believe there's nothing as you can't do."

The patched and spangled suit was in the stage wardrobe. It had been let out to its utmost capacity for the middle-aged pantomimist, and it had to be reduced to the extremity of slimness for Godwin ; but Sarah was equal to the task, and a neater or more agile harlequin had never been seen in French Street.

"I call him the poetry of motion," Mlle. Mariani said to Tony Fortescue, as they all sat over their supper on Boxing night, or in the small hours of the next morning. Sarah, the Fortescues, and warm-hearted Polly Smith were all elated at their protégé's success—and Godwin himself was pleased, though still with a touch of scorn.

He had made a hit as harlequin. That natural gift of pantomime which had shown its tragic side in the character of the savage Orson, had shown itself many-sided in the changing humours of the harlequinade.

In those winter nights, with snow and ice in the street outside, and the feeling of Christmas in the air, Godwin forgot everything but the joy of the moment, the gallery uproarious with laughter and applause, and the unceasing music, now a merry old country-dance tune that had sent a past generation tripping gaily, hands across, down the middle—now a soldier's march, and now a change to something weird and tragic, as when,

in the bedroom scene, Jack Bond startled the house with the dreadful music of the last act in "Don Giovanni"—when the stone image of the murdered Commandante stalks through the deserted hall.

That awful music inspired Godwin; and his acting in the famous bedroom scene—when the lodging-house candle shot up from the candlestick, tall and spectral, and then sank through the stage and left those strange lodgers in darkness—was intense as it could have been in the last act of "Othello." The mock terror of the scene belonged of right to clown and pantaloon. The paroxysm of fear when the sheeted ghost crept out of the closet should have been the clown's business; but the audience had eyes for nobody but harlequin. That splendid music—those thrilling chords—lifted the lad off the common earth. The burlesque horror became a real horror, and his acting belonged to the region of tragedy. Rowsell, standing at the prompt entrance, wondered at the lad's versatility. Only ten minutes before he had been leading the wild riot of the pantomime rally, in front of a fishmonger's shop, hurling lobsters and turbot at the heads of policeman and populace. Everything was real for him, to the sound of Jack Bond's orchestra.

After that success Godwin took a new place in the company. He was talked of now as "a lump of talent"; and he received much kindly advice from the elder players, the men and women who had all begun with the same idea that they were geniuses, and had but to be seen by a London manager in order to be at once transplanted to the "Lane" or the "Garden"; and who had been acting in the humdrum round of provincial theatres until they had almost forgotten that there was such a place as London.

They were all kind, and they all gave him the same advice. Let him stick to the mask and the bat, and he might earn as much in the pantomime season as the ordinary stock-actor could make in a year.

Godwin heard them with his enigmatic smile, that strangely sweet smile which won the kindness of women, young and old. But when he took off his spangled suit on the last night of "Harlequin Bevis and the Dragon of the Ditches," he was fully determined never again to wear mask or wave bat. Stern necessity was to make him break that resolve.

When spring came, and when every little bit of garden in the picturesque old town was brightening with tender green, Godwin's heart yearned for the wild beauty of the Forest, and

he wanted to be rambling alone by the winding stream, reciting the poetry he was to speak by and by; strengthening his voice, curing it of the strangeness that had made an unkind audience laugh at him. Tony Fortescue had given him wrinkles for the cultivation of that splendid organ. He had read the lives of the players who had flourished in the past; and he wanted to exercise all the arts that they had used—the study, the patient labour that had made them great. He knew that, now he had got over the awkwardness of his *début*, he was learning very little in the French Street Theatre, only learning to be useful to the management—acting every kind of part, good or bad, at such short notice that it was impossible to make a character of it. Study was out of the question in this hurried round, with a repertoire of nineteen or twenty plays and farces in a week.

These were halcyon days for Sarah Merritt. She liked the lodgings, and the good-natured, gossiping landlady, and the Fortescues, and Polly Smith. She was never tired of the theatre, where she would sit night after night in the stuffy upper boxes, in an atmosphere of dust flavoured by lamp oil and stale orange peel, seeing the old pieces over and over again: “The Castle of Andalusia,” “The Honeymoon,” “The Mountaineers,” “Raymond and Agnes,” “Speed the Plough,” the “Heir-at-Law.” It was enough for Sarah if her boy had a part in the play—good or bad. It was happiness to see how handsome he looked, and how well he walked and carried himself, since he had learnt fencing and dancing. He was naturally graceful—his movements used to show the untutored grace of the Forest wanderer, the lad who climbed trees, and bounded over streamlets, and ran and leaped across heather and bracken as freely as the forest deer; but his recent training had given him a finer air.

In fair or foul weather Godwin spent his leisure hours in solitary rambles, and in unrelenting study. He wanted to be alone—quite away from all everyday associations. He could not abandon himself to the passion of Othello’s great scene with Iago in the narrow space of his attic, where the maid-of-all-work might be sweeping the landing, or scrubbing the stairs, outside his door, and laughing in her sleeve at his torrent of fierce words. No. He must have solitude and room for self-cultivation; and for this purpose he had discovered a convenient spot within an hour’s walk. It was a deserted garden belonging to an old house on a hill above the village of Milford. Whether the house and grounds were in Chancery, or only waiting for a purchaser, Godwin never knew. All he cared

to know was that the garden—with its overgrown shrubberies on the slope of the hill, and its deeply shadowed lake at the bottom of the slope—was always accessible to him, and that nobody else came there. Fremantle! The very name of the house was romantic; and Godwin fell in love with the abandoned garden and the little lake, so secret and sequestered in its girdle of old trees, from the hour of his chance discovery in an afternoon ramble. He had walked by the waterside many an afternoon, within a hundred yards of the garden, before he found the rusty iron gate hanging on broken hinges by which he went in and out afterwards as freely as if the place had been his own. He had the garden to himself, and it was here that he spent most of his afternoons, leaving home as soon as the frugal dinner had been despatched, and only going back in time to keep his mother company at tea. On Sunday afternoons, and now and then on a weekday, she would go for a walk with her son—but she had her little business of marketing to do of a morning, and her daily walk in the cheaper quarters of the town was almost as much out-of-door exercise as she desired. She never felt herself neglected.

To repeat his great speeches, with every experiment in pitch and intonation—to train his speaking voice and overcome all that was rough and unmelodious, all that was queer in accent or in tone, gave him enough of interest, and more than enough of work, in the short hour at his command. He had always to remember the theatre, where at half-past six the orchestra began to tune their fiddles, and the call-boy was running up and down-stairs, active and insistent, with his harsh cry of "Beginners."

Godwin must stop in the middle of Othello's address to the Senate, and hurry back to French Street, to be in time for tea with his mother, and the long night's work that was to follow.

Those were halcyon days for Sally; but Godwin was panting for change, like a skylark in a cage. It was in vain that his mother, and kindly Tony Fortescue, enlarged upon the advantages of his position, and urged him to accept Mr. Conroy's offer of a second season in French Street. "No travelling—salary sure, and your lodgings comfortable. Mrs. Endell is a landlady in a thousand—and the prettiest town in England. Conroy would give you a ticket night next season, and that might bring you ten pounds, if you worked it properly. What more can you want?"

"I want to be an actor," the boy answered moodily, "and I can never be that with Conroy. He wants all the leading



parts for himself. He told me I should never act Hamlet in his theatre. I must go where I can play the lead. Mary Ann told me that was what I ought to do."

"If Polly Smith told you that, she's a bigger fool than I took her for. You don't know what provincial managers are, Godwin, and how many of them can pay salaries if the money doesn't come in. They start without a five-pound note in their pockets, and their actors may starve or live on the turnips they pull in the fields if the business is bad, and pad the hoof from one tumble-down barn to another. Conroy may be a beast, but he's an honest beast, and salaries are safe. What will you be the better for acting Hamlet in a barn, with an audience of one in the pit, and a manager who will 'have vanished into air, into thin air,' before Saturday?"

"All managers can't be cheats," said Godwin.

"Perhaps not—but a good many of them can. You've had the luck to fall in with a gentleman. Conroy is as honest as a butcher or a baker—and he has wasted most of his fortune in that little theatre. The drama is not a profitable trade, young 'un, not even in high places."

Who can teach prudence to young ambition? Before the end of the week Godwin had refused Mr. Conroy's offer of an engagement for the next season, which would begin early in August, after a summer vacation of eight or ten weeks. He had refused the handsome offer of a guinea a week, and double salary for the Christmas pantomime, with chances of better parts in the course of the season, and a ticket night.

Sarah shook her head despondently when he told her what he had done; but she loved him too well to let him know how sorry she was at leaving the certain salary and the comfortable lodgings, to face the uncertainties of strange towns and strange managers.

## CHAPTER VII

IT was in the middle of May when they left the quaint old town by Southampton Water, on the top of the coach that was to carry them as far as Basingstoke on their way to Reading.

Leading business! At the Theatre Royal, Reading, Godwin was to play the lead. No matter that the coach journey was costly, and that Mrs. Merritt had to draw upon her little capital for travelling expenses. He was to play the lead. He might be in London before the end of the year, with a salary of five pounds a week. He was going to make a long stride forward upon the stony road. The goal seemed so near that the stones hardly mattered.

So far as that question of leading-business was concerned, there was no disappointment. The poor old barn that called itself the Theatre Royal was in the hands of an impecunious low comedian, a favourite in the town, who had taken upon himself the responsibilities of management without a sixpence of capital. Godwin might act in all the great tragedies, provided that by doubling or trebling small parts the cast could be filled by the shrunken company who still hung on in the hope of better days.

The theatre opened on alternate nights. They acted a tragedy three times a week, followed by an uproarious farce, in which the manager delighted the scanty audience, albeit they might seem to have had enough of the comic before the after-piece, having laughed at the tragedy more or less from the rise to the fall of the curtain.

They did not laugh at Hamlet or Macbeth; but they laughed heartily at the subordinate actors, whose reappearance in different characters and changes of garb and make-up provoked mirth.

There was not much audience in the Reading theatre, but what there was inclined to noise. Not much audience, and no money for the actors.

Godwin acted to his heart's content, and threw himself with as much vigour into his impassioned scenes as if he had been playing to a crowded Drury Lane.

This went on for six weeks, and except for a few shillings from the manager now and then, the leading actor was earning nothing. But the rapture of acting, the delight of finding the power of his voice, and making the empty house resound with the applause of a handful of shop-boys and servant girls, made up to Godwin for drudgery and deprivation, for the task of getting eight or nine dejected actors to fill a cast of fifteen or twenty; and for the bread and butter, bloater, and weak tea which had to serve instead of dinner. Sarah bore things meekly for those six weeks; and then the manager was missing one Saturday, and the handful of actors—who had been subsisting on the compassion of theatrical landladies and small shopkeepers—took to the road, and the Theatre Royal closed its doors for ever under that management.

This was the beginning of a pilgrimage of pain. It seemed Godwin's fate to fall upon all the most poverty-stricken adventurers in the provinces, and upon all the towns where the inhabitants had a rooted objection to spending their money on the theatre. Such empty boxes, such a meagre pit, and a gallery in which half a dozen pairs of hobnailed boots tried to simulate an impatient audience! Those were the days when to get from Reading to Bristol cost as much as the modern journey from London to Paris. Before that second year of Godwin's apprenticeship was finished the price of Peggy and the van had melted away; and Sarah and her son had to live upon a meagre diet, and walk from town to town. They knew every high road and every short cut in south-western England before the third year was done. They knew the breezy lands by the North Sea, the black towns, where the smoke-curtain fell over the unlovely streets by day, and the red fires blazed by night. They knew hardships of every kind; and it needed the patience of a Christian martyr on Sarah Merritt's part to keep a cheerful spirit in that long apprenticeship to failure and disappointment; and many and many a night, laying her weary limbs down to rest on some hard lodging-house bed, Sarah thought of her old day-dream of the carpenter's shop and the rural cottage, the garden and the beehives, the poultry and the pig—such a humble life—but, oh, how comfortable—how respectable—as compared with this weary wandering from town to town in garments so shabby that they had more than once been mistaken for strolling beggars.

It was different for Godwin. Whatever happened—whatever the hardships—he had his dream. Whatever the toil or discouragement of the day, the night brought him into another world.

He had his dream. He was Othello—he was Hamlet—he was Richard. The everyday world ceased to exist. He had his dream—and all he wanted was to be understood and applauded by the audience, however scanty, however rough and ignorant. Applause ! He could not live without that. Food, lodging, was of small account ; but he must have applause. Sometimes there came a flash of fortune, when Godwin was engaged to play walking-gentleman in some respectable theatre, where salaries were paid punctually on Saturday mornings. But although this meant food and a certain degree of comfort, perhaps in rural lodgings on the outskirts of the town, it went to Godwin's heart to play Horatio instead of Hamlet, and Montano instead of Othello. It was travelling backwards on the stony road ; and he was glad when Fortune shifted the scene to some tumble-down theatre in a small market-town, where he was allowed to act all the big parts, and was patted on the back by a manager who could only pay half-salaries. What did money matter, so long as his mother did not starve ? In the years that came afterwards he understood how often she had known a sharper pinch of want than she ever suffered him to feel ; and how, when she put his supper before him after his night's work, telling him that she had supped earlier in the evening, that early supper of hers was pure fiction. There were good days as well as bad, or these two could not have lived through the years of apprenticeship. There were happy incidents, friends who were moved to kindness by the genius of the son and the self-abnegation of the mother ; and who gave hospitality and help without offending the pride of either : but it was long before Godwin got an engagement as leading man on a circuit where salaries were certain.

During those troublous years he had acted everything—Hamlet—harlequin—sentimental comedy—broad farce—pantomime. He had sung between the pieces. He had performed feats of arms with non-commissioned officers from the barracks. He had done everything that youth and indomitable energy could do to amuse an audience : and now, after five years, he was the star of a respectable company in the Theatre Royal, Weymouth.

In all those years of hardship his courage had never flagged, and the light that led him on the stony road had never grown dim. Somewhere—far ahead upon that barren highway—success was waiting for him. His faith in his own power never languished. After all that he had suffered of disappointment and absolute want, he was no less sanguine than in the freshness of those

boyish days when he rambled by winding waters and made the forest glades echo with his yell of defiance in the last act of "Macbeth" or "Richard."

Sarah rejoiced in the comfort of this Weymouth season—albeit the salary only just sufficed for their daily needs, and it was hopeless to think of saving anything towards the cost of their next journey. When the season came to an end they would have to tramp the roads again to Godwin's next engagement. He had been a rolling stone ever since he had left Southampton, sometimes for choice, sometimes from necessity. Where would be the next halt? Exeter—Salisbury—Bristol? Mrs. Merritt pored over the map, comparing distances.

"And people think the stage is an idle life!" she said. "Bless 'em!"

It was October, and the shortening days should have been favourable to the fortunes of the little theatre at Weymouth, when something happened that was to be the turning-point in Godwin's fortunes.

The play was "Othello," and it was during his address to the Senate that he was disturbed by the opening and shutting of a door in the private box above the stage—so near the stage that every sound of speech or movement in it was audible to the actors. There were only two private boxes, which were rarely occupied. This one on the prompt side was the manager's box, and communicated with the manager's room.

Godwin did not move a muscle—but the unusual sounds disturbed him—followed as they were by the sound of a conversation carried on intermittently in whispers.

When the curtain came down, one of the actors told him that there was a stranger in the manager's box, a middle-aged buck in a nankeen waistcoat with gilt buttons—possibly a person of local importance, since the manager had seemed deferential.

The nankeen waistcoat was visible all through the play, an object of interest to the frivolous members of the company, disheartened by an empty house; but the stranger's face was hidden by the red silk curtain.

They could only infer from his sitting-out the performance that he was interested by the play, and that he had paid for the box. A man who came in with an order would not have been so attentive.

Godwin had hardly got himself out of Othello's skin, and into the attire of common life, when the call-boy knocked at his



dressing-room door, and told him that a gentleman from London wanted to speak to him.

The mere word—London—fluttered his spirits. London for him meant Covent Garden or Drury Lane. It had no other significance. He was hardly surprised, five minutes later, when the stranger in the nankeen waistcoat met him in the passage outside his dressing-room, and announced himself as Mr. Harvey from Drury Lane, stage-manager at that theatre.

“I have been impressed by your performance, Mr. Godwin,” he said, scrutinising the actor from head to foot. “Bless my soul, you look very young—almost a lad. You looked older on the stage. However, that’s a fault time will mend. Come to breakfast with me to-morrow at the Gloucester Hotel—ten sharp. I should like to have a talk with you.”

Godwin’s quiet acceptance of the invitation might have seemed indifference; but he ran all the way to the little street where his mother was waiting supper, to tell her that the turning-point in their fortunes had come.

Sarah urged him not to be too sanguine. Yet she admitted that the stage-manager from Drury Lane could hardly want to see him about any other business than the offer of an engagement. To her mind, as the years of toil and want passed by, that prospect of a London engagement had become of the stuff that dreams are made of. She had gone too deep down into the slough of despond. She had lost the capacity for hope.

Godwin’s supper was the mere pretence of eating, and when his mother had gone to bed, he rushed out of the little parlour, and out of the shabby street, to the long sea-front and the splendour of the bay, where sea and sand were glorious under the hunter’s moon.

There was no moving creature on all the length of the parade—nothing between Godwin and the hills and the sea. He had that exquisite world to himself in that second hour of a new day: and it was nearly four o’clock when he turned back to the lodging-house, after roaming about the sand and pacing on the edge of the incoming tide. He had already begun those after-midnight wanderings which became a habit with him in his later life. There is not much hope of sleep for an actor who lives the part he plays—and whose brain is on fire with the passion of the scene.

Sleep would have been impossible for Godwin to-night—with his fate hanging upon the interview with the London manager to-morrow morning. The best he could hope of rest before morning would be the relief of tired limbs, and such snatches of sleep

as those tumultuous thoughts would allow. The face he saw in the glass, when he made his careful toilet in the morning, was deadly pale. He was over-tired, physically and mentally, but the thin, straight mouth was set, and the pallid countenance indicated strength and resolution.

The interview across a well-supplied breakfast-table was not a disappointment. The stage-manager was inclined to be condescending; but there was a quiet assurance in Godwin's manner which speedily placed him on his proper footing of equality. The actor's coat might be threadbare, but his shirt was clean, and he looked a gentleman. Mr. Harvey explained the position of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane; expatiated upon his own importance as the chief adviser of the committee of gentlemen, some of high rank, and all of large means—who represented the shareholders, and practically governed the theatre.

"Any engagement I make will be approved by the Committee," Harvey told Godwin, "and I am inclined to do a risky thing, to give you a chance of appearing in the finest theatre in England, the first in rank and importance. Naturally the engagement of an inexperienced young man, with no provincial reputation, totally unknown at Bath or York—the only theatres out of London that rank high—is a leap in the dark, and I shall lay myself open to the disapproval of the Committee, while should you appear in my theatre and fail—my own reputation will be the worse for your failure."

Godwin listened in silence—prepared for disappointment. He sat with brooding eyes and frowning brow, looking into his empty cup, as if he were reading his fortune in the tea-leaves. He did, indeed, think of his mother's superstition of cup-tossing, and how she would have tried to read a story in the little black leaves sticking to the side of the white cup. Was that little line of black specks a procession? The funeral of Henry the Sixth? Did it mean his *début* as King Richard?

The manager talked long and prosily, still trying to play the patron, though Godwin's dark brow kept him in check. He offered to engage the young actor for secondary parts—an offer refused with disdain.

"I have walked all over England and acted for nothing; but I shall never appear in London in minor parts."

The final offer was five pounds a week for leading business. The engagement was to begin in the following January, and was to be for six months. If Godwin made a success, the salary was

to be doubled after the thirteenth week ; and with an agreement to this effect, signed by Charles Harvey, Godwin went back to the shabby lodging in the narrow street and told his mother that Fortune had come. There was an interval to be bridged over between October and January—but in this crisis Fortune again favoured Godwin, and he was offered an engagement at York—that next best to London—where the manager had heard of him as an actor who was likely to make his mark ; and to York Mrs. Merritt and her son found their way, by stage-coach, and wagon, and on foot, eking out the shillings and sixpences hoarded for the journey. The salary offered for York was very little better than the Weymouth salary, so there would be small chance of saving money for the journey to London, and Godwin had never been good at borrowing. He had an invincible shyness about asking favours, and he would rather suffer extremes of deprivation than make his wants known. Nobody ever knew what the young man and his devoted companion suffered in those years of struggle.

They got to York somehow, having a fortnight in which to accomplish the journey—and the manager was not disappointed in the opinion he had formed of Godwin's talent, on hearsay ; the young actor's letter accepting the engagement informed him that York was to be only a preliminary step to Drury Lane—and this fact was soon made known to the patrons of the York theatre, and gave Godwin prestige.

Those three months between September and Christmas were some of the best days of Godwin's life. He found himself for the first time in a provincial theatre of high standing, well built, well managed, and filled for the most part with an appreciative audience. Here he first tasted the sweets of success that meant prosperity, and here Sarah Merritt knew what it was to be sure of a good supper after seeing her idolised son's success in one of the parts he loved. Richard, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear, the people of York saw him and approved of him in the five great plays that give the compass of a great actor ; and before the end of his season—when the legitimate drama was to make way for clown and harlequin—Godwin was an established favourite.

"It seems a pity to be going to London," Sarah said, "when you are doing so well here."

"Garrick didn't stop in the provinces," Godwin answered. "Thank God for York, mother—but York isn't big enough for me. We should never have heard of Columbus if he had stopped in Genoa."

His mother smiled at him fondly. Dreamer or not, for her he was always wise and always perfect. He was Godwin, the creature for whom she had lived, and thought, and worked, for three-and-twenty years of her life. Work came naturally to her, as a condition of her being, and she loved work. It might almost be said that self-sacrifice came naturally, and she loved that. During those easy days at York her needle had been busy making new shirts, and repairing old clothes for Godwin. All the shillings she had been able to save would be wanted to buy him a greatcoat, and the journey would have to be managed mostly on foot—through the short days of December.

She was sorry when the last week at York came—knowing what lay before them. Anybody but Godwin, seeing himself a favourite with the audience, would have asked the manager to give him a benefit, and would have got it—but he had never learnt how to ask favours. He took his week's salary, and he saw the last of the cathedral towers from his seat in the wagon that was to carry him and his mother for the first thirty miles.

## CHAPTER VIII

GODWIN was in London—that golden goal of the actor's race—that dazzling city of his dreams. He was in London, with a London engagement—a member of the most famous company in the world, or so he thought it, the company of His Majesty's Servants, in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, the new and splendid house that had arisen from the ashes of Holland's short-lived theatre, and that had been rising stone by stone during four of those troublous years when England's finances were at the lowest ebb, after nearly twenty years of continental war. The building of that splendid theatre had been financed somehow; but the Committee who managed the Royal playhouse had been losing money year after year, out of which depressing state of affairs came Godwin's chance. Any experiment was worth trying where so many legitimate efforts had failed; hence the engagement of a lanky youth from the Weymouth Theatre, a lanky youth, with an ashen pale face and luminous grey eyes.

Godwin was in London, no matter by what weary stages, spare food, meagre clothing, and worn shoe-leather, he and his mother had achieved the journey. For more than half the way they had "padded the hoof." The coach fare was out of the question, without an advance from the theatre—and Godwin had been too proud to ask for money that he had yet to earn: nor could Sally Merritt choose to declare herself penniless. She was held up through those long laborious days upon the great North Road by her belief in her boy's genius. Whatever they had to suffer now would be recompensed to them a hundredfold by Godwin's success.

Naturally there was the reverse of the picture, the sickening fear of failure, which came into the faithful creature's mind sometimes towards evening, when they had tramped through snow-showers and biting hail, under a darkening sky, and when scanty food and fatigue had lowered her vitality and damped her courage.

Who could be sure of London, remembering the varying fortunes of the past? The nearer they came to the capital the



lower Sally's spirits sank, and when they stood on the hill at Highgate, and saw the black cloud that hid the city in the valley below them, her heart was almost as heavy as if her son had been on his way to Newgate and death. It had been a long stage, and a dinnerless day. No lift from passing wagon! Not a shilling left to offer a carter for a seat in his cart, nothing to be done but to pad the hoof patiently, and to tell each other that they were near the end of their journey.

Godwin was more hopeful than his mother. He forgot those nights of humiliation, those bitter moments—the derision of the rabble in a sixpenny gallery, the scorn of Paisley factory hands. He had been sustained throughout that pilgrimage of toil and privation by the conviction that this weary North Road was for him the way to fame and fortune. He had often heard that there was no audience as good as a London audience for understanding and appreciation. It was easier to please the enlightened inhabitants of the first city in the world, than the ignorant public of the provinces. Godwin had always believed in himself, even during the day of failure, and he was stronger than ever in the assurance of victory. The fire of genius, whose fitful flashes had lightened his darkest hours, and had saved him from despair, had now become a warm and steady glow, that gave him comfort and courage.

He had imagined London as a city of splendid edifices, cathedrals, churches, senate-houses, all magnificent as a dream, and his entrance into the dream-city by way of Tottenham Court Road was not inspiring. He remembered Southampton—the first town he had known—the broad, clean street, with the picturesque gateway at one end and the blue water at the other, the farmer's carts, the gentry's carriages and gigs—all gay with colour—the pleasant stir of market-day, even in mid-winter—the neat shops and the well-dressed people. The London shop-windows of those days lent little light or gaiety to a December evening. London lamps were still burning oil. The costermongers' barrows were the gayest things Godwin saw in Tottenham Court Road.

"Here we are, dear," said Sally cheerily, but there was nearly an hour of resolute tramping along muddy pavements before they came to the place they were to call home—a walk that took them through the Seven Dials and by streets that Godwin thought as dreadful as a bad dream, before they emerged into Long Acre, and from thence struck into Bow Street, where, on his right hand, Godwin beheld an edifice that

thrilled him. The fluttering playbills against the railings told him that this must be one of the two great theatres, the patent theatres, the only houses where Shakespeare's plays might be acted.

"Is it Drury Lane?" he gasped, standing in the middle of the street to gaze at the classic portico.

No. It was Covent Garden, Mr. Kemble's theatre.

He gazed with rapture still; but not with that intense feeling that had thrilled him when he thought it was within those walls he was to face his fate.

They turned into a paved court, and Mrs. Merritt led the way to a decent-looking house near the end, where a candle in the ground-floor window illuminated a small collection of boots and shoes, and a placard announcing that John Selvidge, Parisian bootmaker, made to measure for the nobility and gentry and the theatrical profession, and executed repairs with neatness and expedition.

"Selvidge must be getting an old man. I remember him twenty years ago, when he used to make for the leading actors and actresses, and when he hadn't his equal for a fit," Sally said, as they went in at the open door.

The rooms she had taken were at the top of the house, two small bedrooms at the back, and a front room furnished as a parlour. The rooms looked clean, and the fire, burning brightly in an old iron grate with blue tiles, gave the parlour an air of comfort that cheered the travellers after their winter journey. They had been a fortnight upon the road, and Godwin had felt sometimes during the later and harder stages as if London were an enchanted city that was farther off at night than when they started in the morning, so small was the progress of the short day.

They had arrived dinnerless and penniless, but Mrs. Merritt was now among friends, and a savoury supper was ready.

It was the first really comfortable meal by a cosy fireside that they had enjoyed since they left York.

Mother and son sat over the little round table for a long time, talking of what they had suffered on the road, and of the new life that was beginning for them.

"We must have lodgings in a genteel street when your salary begins," Sally said; "but I thought we could be comfortable here, for I knew Mrs. Hazel when I lived in London—knew her well, before you were born, dear. You needn't tell the people in the theatre where you live. London actors think a lot of

themselves, and have done so ever since Garrick had his fine villa at Hampton, and his gardens with a marble summer-house on a lawn by the river. Garrick was a fine gentleman, and so is Mr. Kemble ; but neither of 'em was as great a genius as George Frederick Cooke, who would have been living now, and at the top of the tree, if he hadn't been such a hard drinker—just drank himself mad, dear, and died in the prime of life."

That dreadful example had no terrors for Godwin, who had hoarded the sixpences his brother actors spent on beer to buy stage properties, and who, from habitual abstinence, had grown to manhood without the thirst for alcohol. From that pleasant evening by the hearth in their sky-parlour, and a long night of deepest slumber, Godwin rose refreshed in body and mind, and prepared for his appearance before the Drury Lane Committee. That very idea of a committee was awe-inspiring. His luggage, with the exception of an old knapsack, had been entrusted to a carrier's wagon at York, and had not yet been delivered in Queen's Buildings : but the knapsack, which had added greatly to the toil of the journey, contained Godwin's bettermost suit, and his new shirts. He had no second pair of boots, and those in which he had travelled too plainly showed the hard wear of the road, even after most assiduous cleaning. His clothes were as carefully brushed as his boots ; but the ultimate result was unmistakable. Godwin went to face his fate marked with the stigma of poverty.

Again and again on the short journey to the theatre he told himself that Mr. Harvey had engaged him, and he could have nothing to fear from the Committee ; yet his spirits sank a little when he found himself standing in front of a table about which some ten or fifteen gentlemen were seated in easy attitudes, all of whom concentrated their attention upon him in a hard, imperious scrutiny, and not one of whom offered him a chair.

The cold, un pitying eyes beheld a young man who looked about twenty, a figure thin almost to emaciation, a pale face with hollow cheeks, dark hair falling in long loose locks over a low forehead in which the perceptive faculties were marked by the ridge over the straight eyebrows, and the most wonderful eyes those men had ever seen.

"What could Harvey have been thinking of to engage such a thread-paper ?" one of the gentlemen asked his neighbour, in a voice so low that only ears made hyper-sensitive by anxiety could have heard him.

"The typical strolling player!" said another. "Just Harvey's way. All his geese are swans."

"Well, sir," said a third and more important-looking personage, addressing himself to Godwin as from an immeasurable distance, the whole world of social difference dividing the wealthy shareholder from the threadbare player, "Mr. Harvey tells us that he was struck by a certain talent in your acting of some tragic character at Weymouth, and that he went so far as to engage you on the impulse of the moment. I must confess that, considering your very youthful appearance, I think our stage-manager would have been better advised to wait a few years before bringing you to Drury Lane!"

"I know, sir, that although Shakespeare's Hamlet is but thirty in the text, and judged by his impulses and emotions, much more like a youth of twenty, your modern Hamlet is sometimes twice that age."

The gentlemen of the Committee stared at each other in amazement. The tone of the low baritone voice, the haughty carriage of the head, surprised them, and the man who had called Godwin a thread-paper now bade him sit down.

"Thank you, sir, I would rather stand."

"We have made a good many experiments in this theatre of late," said the man who seemed highest in authority. "We have had several first appearances of prime favourites from the provincial stage, heralded by extravagant laudation, and resulting in dire failure. We have been losing money for a long time, and have caught at straws. But these rural Rosciuses have not helped us to fill the treasury. If you are to appear in this theatre it must be in secondary characters. Horatio, not Hamlet; Benvolio, not Romeo."

"Then I shall not appear at Drury Lane, sir. I would rather go back to York," Godwin answered quietly, and then with a sudden flash of anger, he struck his hand upon the table, "*Aut Cæsar, aut nullus.*"

"I'm afraid it must be *nullus*. Mr. Harvey will give you your travelling expenses—and you can go back to York."

Harvey, who had been sitting in a corner, biting his nails, now went quickly to the table, and leaning over this potentate's shoulder, murmured, "On my soul, my lord, he is a fine actor. It might be wise to give him a trial."

"Our stage-manager believes in you, sir, but it is his way to be sanguine. Come, give us a taste of your quality—Hamlet's great

soliloquy—or Othello's address to the Senate. Let us judge for ourselves whether you have the true ring."

"In cold blood, in this grey light, before such an audience? No, gentlemen. Acting cannot be judged by samples. I have been engaged to appear in leading business, and I must make my first appearance in this theatre as Hamlet. The public shall be my judges. By their verdict I will stand or fall. I yield to no other tribunal."

"You appear to forget, Mr. Godwin," interposed a fussy little gentleman, who had been fidgeting on his chair, evidently wanting to get a word in; "you appear to forget that we are the owners of this theatre—and that our money is at stake."

"I have something better than money at stake, sir. I have the reputation for which I have laboured, without rest or respite, for the last seven years—nay, longer—for every year that I have lived since I learnt to read. When I stand on your stage I shall hazard all I have in this world to lose. Good morning, gentlemen."

He heard the murmured words, "Insolence—arrogance" as he picked up his hat and walked away, with a distant air that filled them with wonder. They began to think that there must be something in a young man who could wear the garb of poverty without being humbled by it, and could assert himself in his cheap overcoat and broken boots as proudly as if he had worn Napoleon's green velvet mantle powdered with golden bees. What grand movements the thread-paper had, what a splendid walk! Harvey was right, the gentlemen of the Committee told each other, there must be something in the fellow.

Harvey ran after his protégé of last October, his protégé no longer. He was angry with Godwin for having offended the shareholders.

"Look here, my friend," he said, tapping him on the shoulder, "whatever your talent may be, your manners are atrocious. Have you any idea who those gentlemen are?"

He ran over their names. Two of them were noblemen, one a banker, all men of large means, who alone could afford to finance a theatre that had been carried on at a loss ever since it was built.

"I am uninterested in the gentlemen, or their histories," Godwin answered superbly. "You engaged me to act a round of Shakespearian characters. If you know your business, you must know whether I am good for anything or nothing. In any case, I stick to my agreement—Hamlet—Richard—Shylock—Macbeth—or nothing."



"I only saw you in Othello. I may have made a mistake."

"That is your look-out. And in the meantime, as I gave up a salary at York, and had an expensive journey to London, I must ask you to make me an advance that I may pay my way till I begin work, which I hope will be soon."

"I don't know about that," Harvey said curtly; "but you shall have some money."

He took Godwin to the treasury, where the acting-manager, who was also treasurer, gave him a ten-pound note. Had the manager been kind, and the gentlemen of the Committee courteous, Godwin would hardly have brought himself to ask for an advance of salary; but he was too angry to feel his usual shyness about money.

Godwin found his mother sitting at work in the little parlour, anxiously expecting him. He put the bank-note into her hand with a smile.

"That is all we shall have to live upon till I have been at work for three weeks," he said. "I hope they will let me begin soon."

And then he told her how he had bearded the lions in their den. "A whole row of lions, m'am, ten or a dozen of 'em."

He was in high spirits, and described the scene as pure comedy. The purse-proud, arrogant shareholders, their sleek broadcloth, and furred overcoats, gold eyeglasses, and gold-headed canes. "They reeked of gold," he said, "and I stood before them, in my rough coat, and could feel the Turkey carpet through the split in my boot."

Sally was not quick to seize the humour of the situation. She was inclined to regret that bearding of the lions. Her boy was too impetuous.

"I hope you remembered how much there is at stake, dear," she said piteously.

"All—all. Everything is at stake. Cæsar or nothing. If I fail I must go back to the provinces like a beaten dog, and we shall be tramping the old roads again, cold and hungry, hoping for better luck in every new engagement. No, mother," he cried passionately, "*you* shall not go back. *You* shall never lead the stroller's life again. You shall stay in London; and I will earn enough money in the country to keep you in comfort here. They liked me at Weymouth; and they liked me at York. I can earn two or three pounds a week on the York circuit, and I'll forget that there's such a place as London. Don't be downhearted, dear, but screw your courage to the sticking-place, and we'll not fail."

But the bad days had to come—days when even Sally could hardly conjure up a smile to welcome her boy on his coming home from the theatre with the same dismal story. He had stood about in the hall, stood in the cold, watching the actors going in and out, and not one of them had vouchsafed a kindly word. They passed him, some with a stare of scornful curiosity, some with a patronising nod. Harvey had nothing to tell him. Nothing had been fixed for his appearance. Other unknown tragedians were being introduced to the Metropolitan public, with a flourish of trumpets—a Shylock—first favourite in aristocratic Bath—who was to take the town by storm—and didn't. Never did anything fall so flat as the Jew from Bath, though he wore the traditional red wig, and made the Israelite something of a buffoon.

Then came a new Hamlet—a sprig of fashion, introduced and puffed by the lords on the Committee, an amateur whose only stage education had been a single season at Norwich; and the genteel Hamlet fell flatter than the vulgar Shylock. But there were others to come, and the January snow was being swept away—the year was five weeks old, and Godwin was still waiting. Other experiments were to be tried before he could have his chance. There was semi-starvation in the sky-parlour in that bitter winter weather, when a bucketful of coals was more vital than a beefsteak.

Sally was at her best in that dismal interval, that melancholy pause in the drama of life. When things were worst she was heroic. Gloom in her son's face brought a smile into hers. Not for the world would she let him see the reflection of his despairing thoughts in her melancholy countenance.

She had plenty of leisure for sadness in the solitude of that poor little parlour, while Godwin tramped all over London, seeing the wonders of the city of his dreams, the Abbey, St. Paul's, the bridges, the Law Courts, Newgate, which thrilled him with a great horror, as if it were a tragedy in stone—one of those dreadful tragedies of the Elizabethans, in which terror was unsoftened by pity. More than once, hanging over the parapet of Westminster Bridge in the evening, when the passers-by were few, and night was closing over London, he could but think how easy it would be to slip out of a world where there was no place for him. Nothing but the thought of the tender soul who had cherished and sheltered him, the self-abnegation, the many sacrifices of that devoted mother, could have kept him from suicide, in those darkest days of all, when the actors who passed and repassed him by the stage door had begun to

treat his presence there as a superlative joke, and to exchange smiles and winks with each other, if two of them emerged together from the long black passages that led from the stage, and found this threadbare youth standing in the hall, his hollow cheeks blue with cold.

"That poor wretch has begun to look like a vampire," Mr. Allen told his friend Mr. Stormont as they went out of the door.

"A pity he doesn't take up shoe-mending. He has the cobbler's complexion," answered Stormont. "I should like to lend him a sovereign, but he looks as proud as Lucifer."

"Don't venture it. He'd call you out, sure as eggs are eggs. I'm sorry for him, poor lad. I don't believe Harvey means to try him. He contrived to affront every gentleman on the Committee; and Rayner is such a sycophant that he wouldn't give him a chance if he knew he was a second Cooke."

Rayner was the acting-manager, quite as important a person at Drury Lane, in those days, as stage-manager Harvey.

It was the thirtieth of January, the day that Godwin could not think of without a feeling of awe, and a tender sadness, as at the thought of a friend's death. When he left the theatre that bleak afternoon it was to turn his face westward, and walk to Whitehall, where he stood in a snow-shower looking up at the window which had been pointed out to him as the one through which the Stuart king passed to the scaffold and the martyr's crown. How often had Patrick O'Brien recited that tragic story, and with what keen interest the boy had listened. And now in the snow-shower he thought how the king had put on a second shirt to keep himself warm, lest a shiver of cold should be mistaken for fear, and how he had walked across the Park in the winter morning, greater than in the most splendid hour of his reign.

It did Godwin good to think of something that was not himself; and he hurried back to Queen's Buildings with a lighter step than usual.

Even in the depth of poverty the sky-parlour had the look of comfort that Sally Merritt could create, where a sloven would have crouched by the fire and wept over threepennyworth of that colourless comfort which the smart youth of those days talked of facetiously as "blue ruin." Sally had never consoled herself with "blue ruin," or alcohol in any more potent form than half a pint of porter. She had managed and pinched to make Mr. Harvey's ten-pound note last out the time of dearth; but the rent of the attic floor and the cost of laundress and fuel had exhausted that small store, and now absolute want was near.

The hearth was swept clean under a handful of fire, so small a fire, but so cheerful, and the willow-pattern teacups and saucers sparkled in the red light. There was an appetising odour of broiled herrings from a covered dish in the fender, and there was a fresh half-quartern loaf on the table.

"No butter to-night, dear," said Sarah, as if it were a joke, "and the tea will be rather weak, the last pinch of bohea. You look half-frozen, my poor dear, but your eyes are so bright. I think you must have good news."

She almost trembled as she said the words.

"Yes, mother," he answered hotly, starting up from his chair, and pacing the room, "good news for the London public, anyhow, news that ought to fill those empty benches in the pit. A young gentleman from Dublin, as Richard—his first appearance—another of Harvey's experiments. There's nothing on the bills yet, but one of the actors had heard about it—

"What! will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?"

"Another yet?"

He gave the line with Macbeth's hot fury, and then broke into a laugh that was almost hysterical.

His mother was uneasy until she had persuaded him to draw a chair to the table and begin the frugal meal. He drained his teacup with feverish haste; the hot drink refreshed and cheered him, and he set to work upon the herring and a thick crust of new bread with a hungry man's gusto.

"Don't be afraid, mother," he said, seeing her anxious expression. "I'm not beaten yet. When I looked down that dark passage to the stage, and heard the *répétiteur* scraping his fiddle, and the actresses chattering, I clenched my fists and swore to be standing on that stage before long, and master of it. They may slight me now, with their off-hand nods as they push by me. They are in such a d——d hurry, those fellows, while I have time to spare. But they shall be at my feet before we've done."

He laughed again, and flung himself back in his chair, faint and white in the midst of the meal that he seemed to be enjoying.

"It's like the Gospel," he said, looking at the dish where nothing of the two herrings was left but their heads. "A loaf of bread, and two small fishes——"

"Hush, dear, don't be profane."

His laugh scared her, and she saw the perspiration on the pale forehead.

What was that step upon the uncarpeted stair? Somebody in a tremendous hurry?

Somebody knocked at the door, and opened it without waiting for an answer.

Somebody was a black-bearded man. Selvidge the bootmaker, from the bottom of the house, an old friend of Sarah Merritt's. Selvidge, with a newspaper in his hand, breathless after the three flights of a steep staircase. He laid the paper in front of Sally, and stood over her, pointing to the printed page, speechless and gasping.

"On Monday evening, February the fifth, Hamlet, by Mr. Godwin, from the Theatre Royal, York. His first appearance in London."

That was what Sally read there, with staring eyes, widened by surprise, and lips that moved dumbly, shaping, but not uttering the words. Then she read the two lines aloud with a tremulous voice, and burst out crying.

It was coming, the ordeal, perhaps the triumph! She was not so sanguine as her son. She had seen him fail, and had taken his failures more to heart than he had.

"Nobody told me," Godwin muttered gloomily. "How they all hate me!"

"They may not have known."

"The actors? Perhaps not—but Harvey knew, and he passed me without a word. Miss Fountain wanted to talk, but I gave her a short answer. She was in velvet and feathers, and her fur cloak smelt of roses. She was too fine for my liking."

"You will like her better when she plays Ophelia."

"She has played Ophelia with Kemble; and she won't like me."

The theatrical cobbler seemed as glad as if he were personally concerned.

"I'll tell you what, Mrs. Merritt, I'll make your son's Hamlet shoes, free, gratis, for nothing—just for 'Auld lang syne.'"

"You were always a kind creature, Selvidge."

Poverty had had its usual effect of making Godwin acquainted with the varieties of life, and he did not scorn the cobbler's offer. He had loitered by the parlour door sometimes in his aching idleness, and had listened to stories of the actors who had come and gone at the patent theatres: some who had achieved fortune, only to fling it away; some who, courted and petted by the noblest in the land, had gravitated incorrigibly to the gutter. "'It was the drink, Hamlet, the drink,'" Selvidge said, loving a scrap of Shakespeare. "If ever you succeed on that stage, Mr. Godwin," pointing over his shoulder in the direction of the



playhouse which he always spoke of as the 'Lane,' "don't spoil your chances as my best customers did. I made Cooke's boots for Richard, and he was the finest that ever trod the stage; but he was drunk before the third act, and there were groans and hisses when the curtain fell."

To-night Godwin heard the cobbler's talk as in a dream, while the old man knelt on the hearth measuring the long slim foot for Hamlet's black velvet shoes. The wardrobe in the theatre would provide the black tunic and inky cloak, all a-glitter with bugles, that was accepted for the Court costume of antique Denmark.

"There's an instep!" exclaimed Selvidge to his old friend Sarah, holding up the foot he was measuring, for her admiration. "There's blue blood in that foot, Mrs. Merritt, however your son came by it. It may be half a dozen generations back, ma'am, but the blue blood is there. I measured half the peerage, when I was a journeyman, and worked for Scroggs, of Bond Street, and I know an aristocratic hoof when I handle it."

Godwin and his mother laughed heartily at this.

"I'm not a judge like Mr. Selvidge," she said; "but I always said you had a lovely foot."

"And I can tell you it's a fine stage property," said Selvidge.

"And his hand matches it," said Sarah, taking up the long, thin hand in hers, and caressing the tapering fingers.

"It isn't your hand or your foot, Mrs. Merritt," the shoemaker remarked frankly; "I used to make for you; and I've got your measure in my old book. You took a roomy boot, ma'am."

Sally laughed. Her bright, candid countenance and neat figure had won her plenty of admirers in the days of her youth; but she knew that Dame Nature had been careless of detail.

"We shall have Sir Thomas Lawrence painting that long white hand, ma'am, if your son hits the taste of the town. I hope he may. I've seen three Shylocks and as many Hamlets since last year; and there wasn't one of them worth the price of the upper gallery."

When Selvidge was gone Godwin leant across the table, and took his mother's hand, and kissed it tenderly.

He was serious and silent for the rest of the evening. He had been turbulent and hysterical in his despair, but in this new light of hope he was grave almost to melancholy. He was going to stake all upon the cast of the die. If his first appearance was a failure there would be no indulgence for him, no second chance. He had defied fate when he offended the gentlemen of the Com-

mittee, and he knew that acting-manager and stage-manager were both against him. Perhaps this was his most anxious time, and he could see that his mother was anxious.

"She has never believed in me as I believe in myself," he thought. "She has not roamed in the Forest as I have with those tragedies in my heart. 'Hamlet,' 'Lear,' 'Othello!' I used to feel sometimes as if Shakespeare were walking by my side. I have turned, and thought I should see the grave face, the god-like brow. It was a place where a boy might see visions."

He lay awake for the greater part of the night, reciting Hamlet's soliloquies in an undertone, going over all the scenes, testing his memory. There was not a syllable lost. It was not because he had acted the part in a dozen provincial theatres, but because the lines had been engraven upon his mind in those Forest wanderings, before he was fifteen.

He had speech with Harvey at the theatre next day, and was told that he would have one rehearsal on the morning before his début.

"It is not much," he said.

"Quite enough for you, I should think, since you are so cocksure of yourself."

Fanny Fountain was to be the Ophelia, the Miss Fountain who had taken the town by storm as Juliet, ten years before, and had been made famous by the admiration of the second greatest personage in the land. The Prince, no longer in his youthful bloom, and somewhat middle-aged in figure, but still charming and still romantic, had become enamoured of this exquisite Juliet, as fresh and lovely a flower as any rose in the vicarage garden in Cornwall, within sight of Pendennis Castle and the sea, from which she had escaped to the London stage; and the royal personage's romantic passion had become the talk of the town. While the ethereal actress of seventeen was an ideal Juliet, the portly Prince of forty was hardly in character as Romeo. But from the time he was seen one afternoon driving the young lady through the Park in his curricule, they were Romeo and Juliet for everybody, from the fops of quality to the bagmen and counter-jumpers.

But this romantic passion—assumed by certain great ladies to be purely platonic—had been in its heyday ten years ago, and it was supposed that His Royal Highness's romance had subsided to a humdrum friendship. He drove the lady in his curricule occasionally, and she and her chaperon aunt had visited him at Brighton; and certain ill-natured people declared that her bijou house in Hertford Street, three doors from Lord Byron's,

was paid for out of royal coffers. She was still Juliet Fountain, and she was almost as lovely at seven-and-twenty as in her seventeenth year, when she ran away from her clerical father, and came to London, in the company of a spinster aunt, and armed with a letter of introduction to John Philip Kemble.

Kemble had admired her dazzling complexion and graceful figure, but treated her *de haut en bas*—a mere novice, with everything to learn and everything to unlearn. What did he want with such creatures? What he wanted was a highly trained actress, and a genius, to succeed Sarah Siddons, his magnificent sister, the tragic muse, upon whom the swiftly passing years were setting their cruel mark, and who was contemplating her farewell to the stage.

Mr. Kemble would have despatched Miss Fountain without a word of encouragement; but Mrs. Siddons happened to see her, and told him bluntly that he was a fool. There was a fortune in such grace, such beauty, such freshness. Artist and genius though she was, Mrs. Siddons had always an eye to the treasury.

"The girl is a simpleton," John Philip told her. "She wants to play Juliet."

"Let her."

"Do you suppose she can act Juliet?"

"She can *be* Juliet. Give her a white satin gown, and a handsome Romeo. She will hang over the balcony and fancy herself in love with him. If she has a voice that can be heard, she has only to walk through the part, looking lovely, and you'll find she'll draw the town, and bring you as much money as a performing elephant."

This was how Miss Fountain made her *début* at Covent Garden, coached by the immortal Sarah; and it was only after five seasons that, being persistently snubbed by John Philip, she quarrelled with the management, and transferred her services to the rival theatre, at a salary which Drury Lane could ill afford to pay her.

She was not avaricious, but she was generous and expensive, and she was seldom out of debt, in days when debt might mean a sponging-house and the Fleet prison.

This was the famous Fanny Fountain, *alias* Juliet Fountain, who had flouted the young man with the wonderful eyes and hollow cheeks, the young man in the ill-made overcoat and disgraceful boots.

"I should like to have given him a better coat," she told Mrs. Campion, who was to play the Queen; "but I don't like the idea

of playing Ophelia to his Hamlet. If he fails, and they laugh at him, it will be a disgrace for me."

"Not a bit of it," said Mrs. Campion, and then in a whisper, "Is the Prince coming?"

"His box is to be kept for him. He swore he would come in time for my mad scene—but you know——"

"'At lovers' perjuries they say Jove laughs'; but I dare say he'll come to see how pretty you can look with straws in your hair, if he doesn't stop too long over his Burgundy."

"For shame, Campion. He doesn't drink as much as Fox or Sheridan, or my late manager. You wouldn't have a Prince at the top of the fashion, as sober as a Quaker," Miss Fountain said reprovingly. She would not hear her Prince disparaged, though she often spoke slightly of that great gentleman to her confidante.

The one rehearsal was languid and slovenly. The men were careless, muttering their lines, or coming to cues; the women were impertinent, talking and laughing at the wings, yet having always to be waited for, and not troubling themselves to speak the text correctly. The bad fortune of this new venture was a foregone conclusion. The man from York was a certain failure. He was too young; he was too thin. He spoke in a low monotone. Campion, who was to play the King, had christened him a "sick vampire."

"They won't hear him in the third row of the pit," Campion said in the green-room, "and in the gallery they won't see him; in his black cloak he'll be invisible to the naked eye."

"Why do they bring us such specimens? He has no voice, and he can't walk," said Mr. Stormont, who had failed as Hamlet before he took to the heavy business, but who was a picturesque and sepulchral Ghost.

Harvey watched his sometime protégé in sullen silence. Where was the voice that had sounded so fine in the small provincial theatre? The fellow was doomed to fail, and Harvey would have to bear the brunt.

"Can't you put a little more life into it, Godwin?" he called out savagely, after the great soliloquy. "You've been in a devilish hurry to act. Stand up and open your chest, and try if your voice will carry to the back of the gallery."

"I am not afraid of my voice," Godwin answered quietly. "I speak the speech seated."

"'To be or not to be!' lolloping in an arm-chair? Impossible!"

"That is the way I speak it."

"Impossible," repeated the stage-manager, tramping across the stage. "No, sir, such an innovation can't be permitted."

"It is the manner in which I have always acted the scene, sir. I want it to be an innovation."

Mr. Harvey threw his hat into the orchestra. His protégé, the starveling country actor, defied him. The ladies in the wings laughed—Ophelia the loudest of them. This was the first innovation. The second was worse. It was Hamlet's exit after those scathing speeches to Ophelia, which only real madness—not assumed lunacy—could excuse. After walking slowly to the door, Hamlet turned on the threshold, came back suddenly and swiftly, took Ophelia's hand in his, kissed it passionately, and made a hurried exit.

"This is absolute tomfoolery," Harvey muttered. "I didn't engage him for pantomime."

The rehearsal was over. There had been no more innovations. Godwin had done so little in the play-scene, or the churchyard, that when the actors gathered round the stage-manager, after Hamlet had left the theatre, it was to condole with him upon an anticipated fiasco.

"He knows how to handle a foil," said Stephen Barry, the Laertes; "he's a good fencer—and that seems about his only merit."

"He's been dining too often with Duke Humphrey," said the first gravedigger, James Tilbury, the best-natured man in the company. "The poor wretch is as weak as a rat."

"Well, he can't be worse than the last Shylock," said Campion, meaning to be agreeable to Mr. Harvey—the vulgar Shylock having been a protégé of the acting-manager, Mr. Rayner.

Evening came, and Godwin walked to the theatre, carrying his small stock of properties in an old carpet-bag, and his sword under his arm. Nothing was wanting that could accentuate the small importance attached to his début. He was to dress in one of the worst of the dressing-rooms, with Campion and Stormont. He felt that a furtive watch was kept upon him while he was dressing. Stormont was frankly curious, and suspended his toilet in order to watch the stranger.

"Is that all you do in the way of make-up?" he asked, when Godwin had darkened the line of his long, straight eyebrows, and touched his hollow cheeks with a hare's foot.

"Yes, that's all."

"Where's your wig?"



"I don't wear a wig," he answered, while he ran his comb through his long straight hair, letting two or three loose locks fall over his forehead.

The result was picturesque, but to the believers in convention it looked uncanny.

"Hamlet without a wig! My God!" said Stormont.

"You'll look more like a Mississippi Indian than the Prince of Denmark," said Campion. "I shall be sorry to own you for my stepson."

Godwin had left the dressing-room before Mr. Campion had finished his sentence. The two old stagers looked at each other and laughed aloud. The young man from York had certainly one essential qualification for the part he was going to play. He was stark mad.

It was a surprise for Mr. Campion to see that when this strolling player, who defied conventions, made his first entrance upon that spacious stage, to the sound of the trumpets, in the Court train, he looked every inch a prince. The scanty audience gave him a cordial reception, startled into attention.

Tall and slender, straight as an arrow, with a small head nobly poised, and movements which were full of dignity despite the something strange in walk and gestures that at once stamped the actor as a man of strong individuality—the new Hamlet made an immediate impression. For twenty years the tragic actor's walk had been the "Kemble walk"; the tragic actor's voice had been the "Kemble voice." The scanty audience in the pit, and the still scantier audience in the boxes, dispirited and inattentive at the beginning of the act, were at once interested by the something indefinable in the man from York which made him different from all the other Hamlets they had seen. The profound melancholy in the pale oval face, the elf locks hanging over the strongly marked brow, and, above all, the brilliancy of the dark, grey eyes, announced an actor who was not like other actors. Here was what London had been waiting for, the romantic actor. Here was the poetic Hamlet.

The first soliloquy and the scene with Horatio heightened the interest. Exquisitely courteous, yet so distinctly royal, so aloof in the prepossession of a mind which had been nursing a great sorrow, this was Hamlet, the Prince, the one sincere mourner for the King's death, aloof and alone in a Court where flatterers hung upon a new master.

After that scene the audience had no doubt as to the power of the actor. They gave themselves up to the spell of an original

genius. Godwin's success was in an ascending scale, and when after two or three hurried pacings across the back of the stage, he flung himself into the great oak chair, and slowly followed out that train of thought which led from the hopelessness of life to the dread uncertainties of death, there was no one to find fault with the "innovation." The brooding attitude, the wonderful eyes, the music of the voice, the depth of thought expressed in every phrase—the longing for escape from a life that was hateful—the vague horror of a world unknown—all was instinct with genius—and the applause grew warmer with every stage of the play.

If the new Hamlet was a revelation to the audience, Ophelia was no less a revelation to Hamlet.

Miss Fountain, at the morning's rehearsal, disdainful, impertinent, walking through her part muffled in her fur pelisse, with her face hidden by her beaver bonnet and Spanish lace veil, was the very last person he would have chosen for Ophelia. Miss Fountain to-night was Ophelia. It was impossible to imagine anything more beautiful than Fanny Fountain as Godwin saw her moving slowly towards him in the stage light. Her cashmere gown hung in loose folds from shoulder to hem ; pale golden hair fell lightly round a face of childlike beauty, innocent yet piquant, eyes blue as the Forest violets in April, and a complexion so fair that it seemed translucent, a complexion that owed nothing to art, save the faint touch of rouge that was indispensable in the glare of the stage lamps.

She was a lovely Ophelia, and when Godwin dared his second innovation, and came back to bend over her with a countenance of intense pathos, and to take her hand in a hand that was tremulous with passion, and press it to his lips, there were eyes that watched the scene through a mist of tears.

The actor's position had been assured from the first act. There could be no doubt as to his power after the scene with the Ghost.

A thrill of excitement ran through the house, and every new development of power, every fresh touch of originality, found instant recognition ; but it was in the play-scene that the tragedian's triumph culminated. When, at the King's hurried exit, Hamlet rushed across the stage and flung himself into the empty throne, with a wild cry of exultation, the pit rose at him as one man, and those who listened at the wing wondered how so small an audience could create such a tumult of applause.

Manager and actors crowded round Godwin at the end of the

third act. There had been no opportunity for compliments or congratulations till then ; but now they were all about him, Stormont in his ghostly armour, Campion and Mrs. Campion, Allan, the Horatio, Polonius, and the rest of them. But the most startling compliment was from Fanny Fountain, who threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

" You poor, poor dear," she cried, " how could we know you were a genius ? What fools we were ! All we thought of was your worn-out boots, and your common overcoat. And now you can spurn and trample on us."

Godwin did not spurn her. He took her kiss as calmly as if she had been his grandmother ; and then with his tranquil smile he said :—

" I hope you did not mind my innovation ? "

" When you rushed back and kissed my hand ? No, it was lovely. It was what Hamlet would have done if he had a heart."

Harvey watched this little scene, elated and radiant.

" Did I not tell you, gentlemen, that he was a genius, and would make the fortune of the theatre ? " he exclaimed ; and in the hour of success he had no doubt forgotten all that Godwin had suffered of neglect and contumely. The actor was his discovery. He had brought him to the theatre ; and he must have the credit of his success. He shook Godwin by both hands. He looked round exultingly at the ring of actors. " Didn't I tell you I had found a genius ? " he cried. " The Committee tried to snub him—but I knew ! "

" You kept your knowledge to yourself, Mr. Harvey," said Godwin, as he broke through the circle of his admirers and walked to the back of the stage, where he paced to and fro in the darkness till it was time for his next entrance. He would not go into the green-room. He wanted no ovation from the brother actors who had been so unbrotherly in his days of disappointment. He wanted no favour from anybody, now he had come face to face with his judges, the London public. After the play-scene he knew that he was safe ; and he scarcely gave a thought to the audience for the rest of the tragedy. From this time he was no longer the actor whose fortunes were at stake—he was the Prince of Denmark, the son who had unmasked his father's murderer, but who still doubted and deliberated about the murderer's doom. He was the inexplicable dreamer, who could moralise and philosophise in the graveyard, while the man of guilt was still unpunished. His transitions in that last act, the change from the tranquil discourse with the gravedigger to the passionate

grief of Ophelia's lover, and the hot frenzy of his attack upon Laertes, roused the audience again to enthusiasm. This was a Hamlet of lightning transitions, a soul on fire with passion, as unlike the monotonous elocutionist they were accustomed to as flame is unlike ice. The applause at the end of the play was overwhelming; and again the actors wondered that so small an audience could make so much noise.

Godwin was in his dressing-room—that ignominious room which he was to occupy for that night only—before the audience had left off applauding. Mr. Harvey went in front of the curtain, thanked them for their enthusiastic reception of the young gentleman whom he had had the honour of introducing to a London audience, and in whose genius he had an unbounded faith. He announced that "Hamlet" would be repeated on the following Wednesday and Friday, and on three evenings of the next week; after which Mr. Godwin would appear as Richard the Third, and in other Shakespearian characters in the course of the season.

Godwin never knew how he got himself into the garb of common life that night. Campion and Stormont were talking to him while he changed his clothes, officious and over-friendly, offering him advice as men who knew the world inside and outside the theatre, counselling him as to his dealings with Harvey and the Committee, how to get the greatest advantage out of his success. Their voices sounded far off, and there was a noise of roaring waters in his ears that drowned their speech. It was the tumult of applause at the end of the play.

He could hardly breathe till he got out of the theatre, into the mire and slush of the street, where the gutters were running fast in a sudden thaw, and he ran all the way to Queen's Buildings. The door of the lodging-house was open, and the shoemaker was waiting for him on the threshold of his little shop.

"You've done it," cried Selvidge. "You're better than Cooke, and God knows he was a genius. Don't you take to the brandy, as he did, and you're safe. God bless you, my lad."

Godwin thought Selvidge was going to kiss him, as Miss Fountain had done.

"Your shoes brought me luck," he said, as he sprang past his admirer, made for the stairs, and went leaping up to the top floor, three steps at a time.

There was only one friend he wanted to see that night, only one voice he wanted to hear rejoicing over his victory.

"I've done it, mother," he cried, bursting into the room, and

then—as Sarah came to him, and in the old pathetic phrase, “fell upon his neck,” sobbing for joy—he went on gaily:—

“I’ve done it! No more dinners with Duke Humphrey. No more padding the hoof. The pit rose at me. You should have seen their faces—you should have heard them cheer. The house rocked with the tumult. Miss Fountain threw her arms round my neck and kissed me, and the actors crawled. The Prince was there in the third act, but he sat behind the curtains and fell asleep. I heard him snoring; but there were men with him who leaned out of the box and huzzaed as if they were mad. One of them had a ribbon and star. So you see, my old darling, I was right after all. God meant me to be an actor. And I’m to have twenty pounds a week from this night, ma’am; and we’ll dance and we’ll sing, like the witches in *Macbeth*.”

He dragged her round the table, and they danced and stamped like lunatics, till the sleepy little maid-of-all-work came up with a ceremonious message from the second floor, to inquire, with Mrs. Wilson’s compliments, whether Bedlam had broken loose in the attics. They sat down at last, at the little round table which was neatly set out with a frugal supper, cold beef from the cook-shop and hot baked potatoes from a street barrow—no better potatoes to be had than those—a pot of porter, and a saucer of pickles. It was a luxurious supper, compared with their recent fare, and now there need be no more frugality. Sally’s occupation would be gone. She had loved to save and manage, and eke out the shillings and the pence for her son. She had been resigned to small deprivations while she could ward off hunger. How many a cheerful meal they had eaten of bread and cheese, sitting under a hawthorn hedge. How savoury had been the sausages bought at a village fair, sausages that had squealed and hissed and leapt about the pan like living creatures while they were cooking. And now there would be no more hissing sausages, no more thin slices of prime beef from the cook-shop.

Godwin talked huskily from a dry throat, and the fourpenny porter was nectar.

“I had them with me from the very first,” he said, “from the scene with Horatio. I knew I was safe, even then—but it was the play-scene that roused them. You shall ride in your carriage, dear, and forget that your feet ever ached upon a hard high road. It was the play-scene. They stood up in the pit and cheered. It was the old business. You’ve seen me do it to empty benches, and get half a round—or be laughed at by the yokels—but to-night it was a tumult. We’ll take a house in



Gower Street. I saw an empty one the other day, and a garden showing through the open door at the back, and you shall have bees and poultry if you like, and it shall be almost as good as if I'd been prenticed to the Lyndhurst carpenter."

This finished Sarah Merritt, and she let her head drop on the table and sobbed aloud. She had so longed for that tranquil life of village respectability—and here was a triumph, and fame, and gold, and her boy's eyes were alight with happiness.

But was it better, was it really better?

"You shall have a black satin gown and diamond earrings. You shall always wear black satin, and a leghorn bonnet, and I'll drive you in the Park. You shall be just as well off as if I'd taken to carpentering."

He laughed aloud and flung himself back in his chair, almost hysterical. Perhaps in that moment he was madder than Hamlet the Dane.

"We are going to be rich," he said.

"No, no, Godwin, don't say that."

"But I do say it. We have counted our fortunes in pence. From to-night we shall count in gold—only in gold."

"Don't, don't, dear; you don't know what you're saying."

She remembered what old Elspeth had said, that dreadful word at the end of her boy's fortune.

The gold was coming.

## CHAPTER IX

THE gold had come, but it took the form of paper. There was a letter next morning, with the Drury Lane seal, a letter enclosing a fifty-pound note. Godwin was to act a round of characters after Hamlet. His salary was to be twenty pounds a week for the season, and was to be doubled if he was engaged for another season. The fifty-pound note was a present. Godwin had never seen one till now. He gloated over it as if it had been the portrait of a lovely woman by Cosway—but Sally was wiser, and carried it off to a bank in the Strand, and opened an account for her son. She told the clerk of her boy, and his triumph of last night, and was proud at finding that the clerk knew all about it. A fellow-clerk had been in the pit and had assisted in the ovation.

"I am going to-morrow night," he said, "but there'll be a rush when the house opens, and I may not get in. There'll be people waiting at the pit door before dark; and it's a bit cold for standing about."

It was a time of wild excitement for Godwin. His mother remembered how he had once said in an hour of supreme depression, "If I ever succeed in London I shall go mad," and the enthusiasm that he created and the tributes that were showered upon him were enough to have unsettled the reason of a man who had known only hardship and disappointment.

Hamlet was played six times in a fortnight, in a theatre crowded from floor to roof, and after Hamlet came Richard, Macbeth, Shylock, and Othello, characters in which he stood the test of comparison with the famous actors who had won their laurels since Garrick's death. He had the town, the critics, and all the great people with him; men like Lord Bayswater and Lord Guernsey wanted to know him; and the Committee—those lions he had bearded in their den one cold morning that he could never forget—were now his devoted friends, and lavished their gifts upon him. That first present of fifty pounds was followed by a present of a hundred on the sixth performance of "Hamlet," and after his triumph in Richard there came a gift of five hundred. He had retrieved the fortunes of a bankrupt

theatre. Whatever tribute the Committee gave him was but a tithe of the money he had brought to the house. He was the *rara avis* they had hoped for and prayed for when things were at the worst—when rope-dancers, and performing lions, and conjurers had been the last resource of that noble theatre. He was the genius they had waited for. Nothing could be too much for the lanthorn-jawed youth in the shabby overcoat, who had stood before them, proud and angry, in the grey winter light, and had refused to give them a sample of his talent.

The audiences were so full and so brilliant that this sudden success was as much a thing of wonder for the manager and Committee as it was for the actor, who kept his head through it all, and gave no sign before the eyes of strangers of the fever and delight that he felt. At the theatre he was cold and reserved, and received the compliments of his brother actors with a scornful civility. He was polite ; but he was never cordial. The memory of those dreary hours when he had waited about in the hall was in his mind when Harvey fawned upon him, and when the Campions and Stormont pressed him with officious friendship, eager to help him with advice, as a stranger in London.

He would be shifting his lodgings, no doubt, now that he had made such a success that all the great people would want to know him.

"The house is snug enough, and Mrs. Hazel is a landlady in a thousand," Campion said, "but you can't have Lord Bayswater or the Prince's equerry calling upon you in a sky-parlour in Queen's Buildings."

This was meant to put Godwin in his place, by reminding him that his brother actors knew what a penniless youth he had been when he joined the company.

"You'd better let my wife trot round with your mother, and show her some good houses where they make things comfortable for the profession. She can take her to first-rate apartments in Southampton Row and Guildford Street—or, if you like a view of the river, there's Surrey Street, or Norfolk Street."

"You are very kind. My mother has lived in London, and knows every street in the neighbourhood of the theatre, and she doesn't want to be in lodgings all her life. We have taken a house in Bedford Square—a house with a garden."

"Are you going to furnish it?"

"My mother is busy buying furniture."

"Does she know where to go for it?"

"Yes, she seems to know all the furniture-brokers in London. We like old things, with a history, if we can get them."

"Those Bedford Square houses are large. You'll want a lot of sticks. It will run into a thousand quid, before you know where you are."

"I don't think it will. My mother is a good manager. We shall not be extravagant."

"A large house? That means settling down for years. You're not afraid of your success being a flash in the pan?"

"No," Godwin answered gravely, "I am not afraid."

In the green-room that night Mr. Campion told the actors that this young Godwin's arrogance was insupportable. They all had something ill-natured to say about him.

"Poor devil! He thinks it's going to last. He doesn't know the British public. *Varium et mutabile semper*. . ." said Campion, who had been educated at St. Paul's School.

"D——n your Latin," said Stormont. "He has gone up like a rocket, and he'll come down like a stick."

"Why, he can't speak plain English. His vowels are all wrong."

"I'll take the Gurst's word for a thousand pounds."

The others laughed and echoed "Gurst," mimicking the new actor.

"And his long legs, and his long stride!" exclaimed Allen, who was of insignificant stature. "He can neither walk nor speak like a human being."

"That's why the audience like him."

"Yes, while he's a novelty. But it won't last. They liked the performing quagga last Easter—but I'll bet a guinea that the quagga was butcher's meat before the end of the year."

This talk was not as malicious as it seemed. It was a natural desire to make mock of a youngster who had jumped over their heads. They tried to think there was something ridiculous about a youth whom all London had chosen to accept as a genius. It was the actors' way. Had he made a dismal failure, or had he been sick or starving, they would have been kind, and shared their last guinea with him: but a gaunt youth who had dropped from the clouds and made himself the centre of attraction, to the utter obliteration of all other talent, and was being puffed by the critics and loaded with gold by the management, must needs have been curiously meek and humble in order to escape animosity.

Godwin's arrogance was of a purely negative kind. He never

bragged of his success. Indeed he talked very little, and never talked of himself. He was no egotist, so far as speech went ; but the actors credited him with a consuming fire of self-satisfaction, a consciousness of superiority too intense for expression. They would have liked him much better if he had been a noisy boaster, clapping them on the shoulder, bragging of last night's applause—friendly and familiar, with a generous liking for hot brandy-and-water, and ready with his cash in the bar of the theatrical tavern. Godwin did not drink brandy-and-water, and never lounged in the tavern after rehearsal. "He goes straight home to his Ma"—the actors said with sour jocosity. They could not forgive him for having saved the fortunes of Drury Lane, albeit their bread and cheese depended on the theatre.

He did not dress with them now, and they had no opportunity of criticising his costume, or his make-up, for Richard or Shylock. He had his own dressing-room—the best in the theatre, and his own dresser.

Selvidge was sitting up half the night to make boots and shoes for him. The Hamlet shoes, "free, gratis, for nothing," had been a good investment for Selvidge.

But when Godwin was pulling on his fifteenth-century boots, of the finest brown morocco, he could but think of Mr. Dalmayne's russet boots, which he had worn for Richard in half the towns in England ; for brigands, for villainous pirates in nautical melodrama—which he had worn till the soles were parting from the uppers, and the russet leather was napless and shiny. He had wondered often where his next boots were to come from ; by what happy chance, by what unexpected kindness of a friend yet unknown. And now he was giving Selvidge almost daily orders, without question of price : with a princely carelessness and liberality that began from the hour when he found himself rich, and that never changed. The Campions told each other complacently that this high and mighty young gentleman would end his days in the workhouse.

Happily, there was Sarah Merritt in the background of the young man's life—Sarah, who had managed the van, and counted gains and losses, and who knew the cost of common things. Godwin, who was utterly indifferent to money, handed all his bank-notes to Sally, going to her for gold and silver as he spent it : and she took care to let him know when she thought he was spending too much.

"If you wanted me when you were poor," she said, "you want me a great deal more now you're rich. We all know you're a



genius, dear, and I suppose it's the way of a genius not to be able to reckon pounds, shillings, and pence—by which token we know that the Kembles are not geniuses, whatever people think them."

Godwin laughed. Money was for him only a symbol. He liked it because it meant success.

Sarah had been afraid of taking the big house on the east side of Bedford Square, a princely house, which came many years afterwards to be divided into two houses of handsome size. The rent was a hundred and twenty pounds.

"You've made a splendid success, Monkey," she said, calling him by the old foolish name which had ever come easier than George, "but how do you know that it will last? George Frederick Cooke's didn't."

"But that was Cooke's own fault."

"But your success is too brilliant! You won't have the Committee sending you a present of five hundred pounds every year, nor yet unknown friends sending you bank-notes in letters franked by great noblemen. *That* can't last, though you may always get a good salary—as long as you keep your health."

"Let us be rich while we can, mother. I shan't mind being poor again—no, not if I had to walk from York to Bristol. I shall have had my day. My dream of life has come true. That's all I care for. But when we've got more money in the bank, I shall buy you an annuity, and a cottage on Wimbledon Common, that fine, breezy place where Pitt lived and died. I'll make you safe, dear. You shall never know hardship again."

Sarah kissed him, and told him that her own fate didn't matter; which was true. What had she ever cared for but to see this son of hers happy?

She repeated that sweet psalm of rejoicing—

"And now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,"

every night as she laid her head upon Mrs. Hazel's comfortable pillow.

They were still on that third floor in Queen's Buildings, though Godwin had two thousand pounds on deposit at Child's Bank. He was not ashamed of having come to London penniless, or of living in a garret. These sordid details of life were of no account for the man whose one ambition from his twelfth year was to be a great actor. That dream realised, nothing mattered.

He had taken the big house for Sarah Merritt. He knew

what she had suffered and sacrificed. The house was to be an exchange for the van. If he could have bought Peggy from the gipsies he would have put her in a light gig, and driven her in the Park, and given her a loose box in the best livery yard in London. He wanted the house for his mother. She was to have the first-fruits of the most wonderful success that ever an actor had made since Garrick.

They went about the Strand, and Long Acre, and Holborn together, hunting for furniture in the brokers' shops; and they did not do badly. The things that are "distinctly precious" now, and for which the artistic householder gives high prices, were of small account then. Chippendale and Hepplewhite went cheap. French furniture of the recent Empire period was anathema. Convex mirrors with an eagle on the top were the sign of a lodging-house parlour; and who would buy a gate-legged table? The things were not old enough to be called "quaint": they were only out of fashion. Sarah chose these treasures of dark mahogany and exquisite workmanship because they were substantial and cheap: Godwin chose them because they were beautiful.

The large rooms suited the large and sometimes ponderous furniture: old mahogany chairs, with claw and ball feet, richly carved backs, and seats broad enough for Falstaff; bookcases with classic pediments and glass lattices. Godwin meant to collect a library when he had time to search the second-hand bookshops for books about Shakespeare and the men of his time, and about all the famous actors who had trodden the stage where he now reigned supreme. Others had drunk the same intoxicating cup, the cup of the successful actor, in which the wine of life is fresher and stronger than in any other calling.

The actor's glory comes in a moment, and rushes upon him with torrential force. He has not to sit at home like the author or the painter, waiting to read what the critics have to say about him. He need not measure his success by the sordid test of money. His triumph comes to him at fever heat, from the hands and lips of the multitude in a state of exaltation. He sees and hears how he has moved them. Their hearts are beating almost as tumultuously as his own—their emotion is only second to his.

From that first act of "Hamlet," when the half-empty pit warmed to enthusiasm, Godwin knew that he had his audience with him, and that his dream was realised. Henceforward it was the long and painful apprenticeship that seemed to him nothing but a dream—a dream that was never to be forgotten, that came

back in vivid vision of things that had been bitter, and always brought a vague sense of pain.

And in all those years the bitterness was not of toilsome journeys in fair and foul weather, of deprivations, wretched lodgings, broken boots, clothing too scanty to keep out the cold. The bitter things he remembered were his failures, the towns where his acting had won no applause, the more accursed towns where he had been laughed at; the poor parts he had been obliged to act under the grinding heel of necessity; the Hamlets to whom he had played Horatio, those base imitators of Kemble and the school of "paw and pause," stilted barn-stormers, whom he had heard applauded to the echo, while that something strange in his splendid baritone voice had made the gallery snigger. *That* was now the dream. He sometimes wondered if those cruel experiences were real; but he never doubted the reality of his present position. Nothing but illness or age could overthrow him. The world had gone after him. Before he had finished his round of Shakespearian characters his fellow-actors were vanquished, and had left off talking about the mutability of the British public. Godwin had made a revolution in dramatic art. The school of Macklin and the Kembles was dead. The revolution that Garrick made at the little theatre in Goodman's Fields sixty years before had been repeated, and a self-taught actor of three-and-twenty had shown the world that Shakespeare's characters are living creatures with hearts that beat and thoughts that burn, not moving statues.

Each new performance increased Godwin's fame. He went from strength to strength: but the more distinguished of his critics gave the palm to his Othello. That was the culmination, the triumph of Nature over Art, the furthest departure from the artificial school, the slow and haunting elocution, the formal and studied movements that had held the stage since the death of Garrick, with the single exception of George Frederick Cooke, who had much of the power, but none of the imagination that lifted Godwin from the dull level of daily life into the dream-world of the poets. Cooke had been natural, but he had never been poetical.

That first night of "Othello" was a night to be remembered. It was no new thing for Godwin to see a brilliant audience, for from the night of his first appearance he had acted only to full houses; and to his fellow-actors, depressed by a long period of ill-fortune, the change had seemed as magical as the work of a stage fairy's wand in a Christmas pantomime.

The green-room at Drury Lane had now become a favourite resort of the most distinguished men of the day, men famous in art and letters, politicians, great noblemen, and here Godwin had his first experience of Society, in its highest and most attractive form. The young man, reared in woodland solitudes, and whose years of adolescence had been devoted to the enthusiastic pursuit of an elevating art, had very little to learn, and nothing to unlearn, neither in vulgar habits nor vulgar ideas, and he took his place among the great people who admired him, as easily and as naturally as if he had been born among them.

After the first act of "Othello," Campion, who was acting Iago, told Godwin that the Prince of Wales and two of the royal dukes were in the Prince's box, and insisted upon his brother actor looking through a hole in the curtain to see those superlative spectators. Their presence was no novelty, for they had seen the new actor in all his characters; but to-night they had a famous Austrian Prince with them, and had come in more than usual state.

Godwin did not spend much attention upon these illustrious personages. He was looking at a woman in the stage-box, a woman whom he had seen in the same box several times since his second performance of Hamlet.

She was not a young woman, but she must once have been beautiful, and she was still handsome, though rather faded and rather haggard, like a fine picture that has been badly treated. She was overdressed, or at least Godwin thought her so, whose taste leaned to simplicity in women's clothes. She wore too many diamonds, and her blue satin bodice was cut too low upon her opulent shoulders.

"Oh, at last you are looking at her," said Fanny Fountain at his elbow. "She has been in that box on all your nights, looking at you till her eyes must have ached, and you have taken no more notice than if you were made of stone. What do you think of her? Fat, fair, and forty, the Prince's taste."

"Then in this instance I differ from His Royal Highness. Who is she?"

"Mrs. Longford, a City man's wife. That's all I know about her. The husband is sitting behind her—a white, flabby man. I think he must have made his money in tallow."

Godwin's gaze had left the City lady, and had gone higher. He rarely looked at any particular face in the front of the house. He saw his audience *en masse*, and to his mind that assemblage was not a vast number of individuals, but one great heart that

beat in time with his own, one voice which supported and inspired him.

But there was a face in the box above Mrs. Longford's of which he had for some reason become keenly conscious—a sweetly serious young face—a countenance in which intellect and emotion were paramount. He hardly knew if the lady with brown hair neatly banded on a broad forehead, and eyes of darkest hazel under pencilled eyebrows, was indeed beautiful. He only saw what Byron saw in beauty of the highest order, "the mind, the music, breathing from her face."

This lady wore no diamonds, no flashing tiara or ostrich plumes. The single string of pearls round a perfect throat was invisible to Godwin, though Fanny Fountain's keen eyes noted every pearl. Her dark velvet gown was severely simple.

Fanny pulled Godwin away from the curtain. "You have had more than your share of the peephole," she said.

"Do you know anything about the lady in the box above Mrs. Longford's?"

"Ah, she is more to your taste?"

"It is a very intelligent face. I can see that she loves Shakespeare."

"And a Shakespearian actor. I'll wager that it is the actor and not the bard she admires."

"What do you know of her?"

"Very little. She is a baronet's widow—rich, with a considerable share in the theatre, so no doubt she is grateful to you for turning the tide of our fortunes. The black-a-visaged young man, who is with her always, and who sits in the back of the box scowling, is her brother. They are Roman Catholics, and he was meant for the priesthood, but kicked over the traces somehow, and missed his vocation."

"You seem to know all about them."

"Oh, in London one knows all about everybody. It is all we do know, having no learning or taste for books."

"Don't you care for books?"

"Not I. They give me the blues."

It was not often that Godwin and Miss Fountain talked as much as this. She was always animated and loquacious, talking to everybody, and talking at random. It was feather-brained talk, with a spice of malice, and a ripple of girlish laughter in the pauses of the conversation. The green-room had a joyous air when she was in it. The clear voice, the silvery laughter, even the



flutter of her gauze scarf, her ribbons, and the flowers in her hat, all made for gaiety.

To Godwin she had been always a disturbing presence, from that first night when she had put the seal upon his success with her kiss. She would have repeated that performance after each of his triumphs if he had let her; but the young actor was not to be kissed unawares a second time. He did not wait for compliments and congratulations—but walked straight to his dressing-room when the play was finished.

Fanny had tried hard for his friendship—or was it something else she was trying for, something that is not to be won by trying?

Godwin had not been spoiled by success: but he had not forgotten those dismal winter mornings in the draughty hall, or the cold indifference of the men and women who were now his officious friends. He had not the happy-go-lucky temper of the typical actor, but was intense and sensitive; and there were things in his life that he could not forget, any more than he had forgotten his dog's death, or the sale of Peggy and the van.

He meant to go down to the Forest when the season was over: to see Peggy and all his gipsy friends, who, of course, would know nothing of his provincial struggles or his London success. He would go to them with a pocketful of gold, and spend the greater part of his holiday in the old woods, where he could roam about in the deep green solitude, as in the days of his boyhood, and would make the silver-grey trunks of the beeches resound with Lear's tremendous curse. "Lear" was the play with which the winter season was to begin, and he knew that the critics would expect much from him after the success of his Othello.

He had a dog now—the first since Nick. A Scotch duchess had given him a long, hairy beast, whose bark was as loud as a mastiff's, and whose presence in the spacious house gave Mrs. Merritt a sense of security "in the dead vast and middle of the night," when the watchmen were calling the small hours. She was on the free list at the theatre, and went to see her son in every new character, sometimes more than once—but she did not go as often as in those old days when a hard bench in the upper circle was the only alternative to a lodging-house parlour in a dreary back street: in winter without fire, in summer without fresh air. Both are luxuries that poverty must forego.

She loved the fine large house, and her office of housekeeper. Never were servants better drilled than her two Hampshire lassies, procured by her old friend at the lodging-house in French Street.

Never were rooms and furniture so speckless and perfect. She was seldom without a dusting-brush or a polishing-leather in her hand during Godwin's absence, though she made a feeble pretence of being a fine lady when he was at home, and sat in an arm-chair, with her satin skirt spread on each side of her, and her hands only occupied with a piece of worsted work, in which she made no more progress than Penelope, though there was nothing to unpick at night. Every mahogany wardrobe and bureau offered a shining surface that might have served as a looking-glass. Godwin said those reflections in the dark wood were the stuff for making ghosts. A former tenant of the house, a famous lawyer, had cut his throat in the garden one summer evening, and had been seen in the house, some people declared, at the hour of his death.

"When I go into my room in the twilight, I fancy I see the last tenant, who lay there in his coffin—a sheeted figure—looking at me out of that great mahogany wardrobe!"

"That comes from acting Hamlet so often. Your mind is full of ghosts."

"Sometimes. And without reference to the suicide in the garden, you must own that this is rather a ghostly house. The rooms are so large that however many candles we burn there are always dark corners. But I like space and shadow. I think it was my Forest rearing that has made me hate small rooms, and narrow streets, and a small stage to act on. I shall never forget what I felt that first night, when I walked on to the stage of Drury Lane, and saw the audience far away, and felt the height and breadth of that great theatre. It was the first time I had room to act, the first time that the illusion was complete. I was not upon a stage, but in the hall of a king's palace."

The house was more richly furnished than Godwin had ever meant it to be: for the *furore* he had created within those four months of his first season showed itself in more ways than the filling of the big theatre, which was naturally the most essential form of success.

He had many other evidences of his popularity. All the cleverest men and women in London wanted to know him. Mrs. Merritt was accustomed to see the drawing-room full of aristocratic or fashionable visitors, and bore herself among these great people with a frankness and simplicity that everybody admired; always quiet and at her ease, with a proper respect for exalted rank, but never servile or fussy.

People, talking of the son as one who was born a prince, had a word of praise for the mother, who was evidently of humble

origin. The contrast between mother and son was curious and interesting.

"Genius has no genealogical tree," Lord Byron said, when the difference was discussed. "Godwin is no more wonderful than Burns."

The young actor had more invitations to dinner on his off nights than he had time to acknowledge promptly. Gifts came to him from such great people that it would have shown a vulgar pride to refuse them. A royal duke sent him an Oriental carpet for his dining-room; and women of *ton* filled all the cabinets in his drawing-rooms with choice morsels of old china—Dresden, Sèvres, Nankin, Swansea, Bristol; and a full-length figure of Garrick as Richard, in Chelsea china with the gold anchor. Sarah marvelled at these riches, gifts so splendid, of which the givers made so light.

"I saw the china Garrick at a sale, and told my husband that I must have it for Mr. Godwin. The Duke bid desperately till he got it," the Duchess of Pentland told Sally, who was greatly impressed by the china figure. "Beautiful! No! It is not half good enough. Nothing can be too good for your son."

Sarah thanked the kind Duchess, who was an enthusiast about dramatic art.

"Hector is the only thing I have given him worth having," she said. "I hope he is fond of Hector."

"Too fond!" said Sarah. Whereupon she told this kind lady the story of Godwin's first dog. "It was some time before he began to love Hector," she said. "For he couldn't forget Nick, though it is fourteen years since he lost him."

"But Hector would insist upon being loved," said the Duchess. "Scotch dogs are tyrants to their masters."

"Yes, indeed, your grace. Hector wouldn't keep his distance; and now he sleeps on Godwin's bed, and goes to the theatre with him every evening, and lies on a rug in his dressing-room, and he is the best-behaved dog that ever was; for though he is about the wings and on the stage at rehearsal, he never attempts to leave his master's room during the performance."

Sometimes, in that plethora of gifts, Sarah's thoughts would go back to the days of deprivation, of meals that an anchorite could not have considered luxurious; and she thought what a delightful present a sirloin of beef or a ham would have been at that time; and then she remembered those rare gifts that had come to them in all their seven lean years, a small canister of tea from

a rich grocer at Yarmouth, a Christmas turkey from an admirer at Bristol, two one-pound notes in a blank cover. The gifts in that hungry time had been few, and Sarah had never talked to Godwin about them, lest his pride should take offence—and now she saw him accept the treasures his fine friends showered upon him with a royal ease. He was himself so generous, so lavish in hospitality, and so liberal in his use of money, that gifts from the rich troubled him with no sense of obligation. He who was superb in giving could accept superbly.

Now that he was dining out on most of his off nights, Godwin began to entertain on his own part, and the supper in his spacious dining-room after each new impersonation was a banquet that the town soon got wind of, while people of first importance were eager for invitations.

Bedford Square was alive with the rolling of wheels and the voices of linkboys on those nights. Godwin's guests drove straight from the theatre to the grave old house, where Sarah Merritt stood ready to receive them at the top of the staircase, in her best satin gown and blonde cap, while, before the last of the visitors had been announced, Godwin was standing at his mother's side, very pale after the night's fever, with dark hair falling loosely over a white forehead, and the grave, kind smile that women loved. He had entered his house by the tradesmen's door, and had come to the drawing-room by a back staircase.

The suddenness of his appearance was startling and impressive ; but he was too natural and spontaneous to be suspected of doing anything for effect.

He had to struggle through the ring of his admirers, all wanting to tell him what they thought of his last effort, and to get his fine friends to the dining-room as quickly as possible, lest wits and statesmen should have time to be bored ; and once seated at the long table where there was ample space for his guests, he knew there was no fear of ennui setting in on this side of daylight. Beautiful women, men with ribbons across their waistcoats, sprigs of fashion, and stars of the literary and artistic world, people who all rejoiced in the genius whose success they believed they had helped to make—they were all there, the followers, the enthusiasts, who talked of the new actor as if there had never been a Betterton or a Garrick ; and as if natural acting had never been seen upon the London stage till this young man appeared there.

Godwin's Scottish devotee, the Duchess of Pentland, was rarely absent from the Bedford Square suppers. It was not a question of

being always invited, for no sooner was the new play announced than the gracious lady informed Godwin that she was coming to supper with him.

"And how delightful it would be if you would ask just a few of your particular friends, Lord Bayswater and his wife—some Scotswomen are prudish, but not I—and Byron, if he is still in London—or at least Tommy Moore, and if Mrs. Merriitt would give us a smaller room, where we could sit and talk till sunrise with our elbows on the table. If you wanted to please me, Godwin, that is what you would do after the next play."

"Impossible, dear Duchess. On the first night I must have as many of my friends as my longest table will hold. But if you will name some other occasion, it shall be for you to command and for me to obey."

The long table after the play had become an institution, and since it was impossible to find room for the whole company, Godwin invited none of his brother actors, and had to suffer much opprobrium therefore, as he had from some of his critics, who dared not avenge themselves in their newspapers, yet whose angry passions raged at the idea that while Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt had been bidden, there had been no room for the small fry.

Godwin had to pay the penalty that follows an exceptional success. If he dined at great houses and had patrician visitors it was said that like Tom Moore, George Godwin loved a lord. If at a table that held forty, there were only two or three guests of his own rank, it was said that he looked down upon his brother actors, and was ashamed of his relations. Who had ever seen anyone belonging to him except the homely mother? It was no doubt to his credit that he was not ashamed of her: yet, on consideration, even this was an evidence of his arrogance, that could impose a vulgar parent upon dukes and duchesses.

"He puts her at the head of his table, when she ought to be in the kitchen, cooking the supper," Mrs. Campion said in the green-room, when the actor's vogue was being talked about.

"Supper! Why he has it from the Clarendon, brought in a procession of vans, and he has a man in livery behind every guest. The suppers at Carlton House are not more sumptuous."

"But there is at least a difference. Godwin does not get drunk before his visitors leave."

As he did not drink in public there was an idea that he must be a secret drinker. It was said that he never went to bed without a bottle of brandy by his pillow, and the bottle was always empty in the morning.



"That's not true," said Tilbury, "for he never goes to bed. He walks about London all night. People meet him in queer streets east of Ratcliff Highway, wandering alone, and talking to himself like a lunatic."

"He spends hours on Westminster Bridge staring at the river," said Stormont.

No one knew where these stories came from, and most of the people who repeated them knew they were absolute inventions; but they served for the sport of the moment.

Among those who resented his exclusiveness was the lady who was to act Cordelia to Godwin's Lear, she who had been his Ophelia, his Lady Anne, his Desdemona; and who thought it a strange thing that she was not the star of those supper-parties, about which the actors had so much to say. Did he owe nothing of his success to her grace and beauty? How hard, how ungrateful he was! She ought to have been at the head of his table, instead of that homely mother, whose acquaintance she had tried to make, but without success.

Mrs. Merritt somehow had a curious shrinking from this effusive creature who expatiated upon her son's genius with ardour that ought to have won a mother's heart.

"I'm afraid you don't like me, Mrs. Merritt," Fanny Fountain said at the end of a morning visit, when the house in Bedford Square was but just set in order.

No one had asked her to call, but she had insisted upon being one of the first to pay her respects to Mrs. Merritt.

"I am dying to see your house, and to know your mother," she told Godwin at rehearsal the day before she made this visit. "If she is like you I shall love her."

"She is worthy to be loved—if tenderness and unselfishness are virtues."

"She is your mother, and that is enough," said Fanny. "Tell her I shall call upon her at twelve o'clock to-morrow."

Godwin thanked her, but without enthusiasm. She had trodden upon his dog more than once in the course of the rehearsal.

"That dog of yours means to bite me before we have done with each other," she said pettishly.

"He will, if you make a point of treading upon him."

"Do you suppose I do it on purpose?"

"No, but as he is not a small dog I think you could see him, if you cared to look where you are going."

"I hate Scotch dogs. There never was a dog at rehearsal

before your time ; except my Italian greyhound, an angelic creature, who died of an underdone sweetbread."

" I am sorry Hector annoys you. But I should be obliged if you would remember that he is something more than my dog—he is my friend."

" Is that because a duchess gave him to you ? "

" No, Miss Fountain. It is because he has a heart, and loves me."

" Do you think that nobody else has a heart ? Do you think nobody else has ever loved you ? "

Godwin was turning the leaves of his book. They had been rehearsing " Lear " for the first time, and he had read his part, though he was letter-perfect. It was no longer a question of one rehearsal, shuffled through with disdainful carelessness. Godwin was master of the Drury Lane stage now, and could have as many rehearsals as he liked ; and the old actors did not love him any better for making them rehearse plays in which they had acted before he was born, and with which they were so familiar that they had ceased to see any merit in them—or to think " Othello " a better play than " Venice Preserved."

Godwin did not answer Fanny's question, nor did he see the pretty pouting movement of a rosy underlip that expressed vexation at his silence.

They were standing side by side in one of the wings, during a pause in the rehearsal. The carpenters were trying the scenery for the storm-beaten heath, and stage-manager Harvey was standing in front of the float with his hat on the back of his head, ready to be thrown into the orchestra at the first blunder on the part of the men.

Fanny broke the silence with a startling question. " Were you ever in love, Godwin ? "

" I am in love every night when I play the lover. I am in love as Romeo—steeped to the lips in romantic love. I am in love as Othello, and on fire with passion. But I know no love without the lamps and the audience to keep the fire alight."

" What an artificial creature you must be."

" I suppose all art is artifice."

" Sham passion—sham feeling—sham joy—sham sorrow ! What a cheat you are, and what a trumpery false business your life must be. Yes, you are a cheat, Mr. Godwin. When you come springing on to the stage in the second act of ' Othello,' and clasp me to your breast, and say, ' If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy,' I cling to you in a passionate dream, and for

one moment I believe it is real love. Again and again I have thought, 'This cannot be acting! We are not stage lovers. My tears, my beating heart are real—and this love cannot be a lie.' "

"That is the exaltation of genius, my dear lady. You could not be such a sweet actress if you did not feel the magic of the scene. That is the spell a divine poet can cast over our common clay."

"And I suppose I should feel the same if Stormont was Othello, although he is as fat as a pig, and puffs like a grampus," she said with a boisterous laugh.

The men had set their scene, and Harvey's hat was still on his head. The rehearsal went on, but there were pauses, and Miss Fountain had another opportunity for conversation with Godwin, on her part mostly interrogative, on his reserved and brief. He had the book always in his hand, and looked at the page more than at Fanny's blue eyes.

"Your two admirers are very constant," she said, after some frivolous questions about the people he had been meeting in society.

"What admirers?"

"Mrs. Longford, and the lady in the box above her."

"I suppose when a lady has her own box, it is only natural she should occupy it?"

"Perhaps you have met them in the great world, and know more about them than you did that night we looked at them through the curtain. Mrs. Longford, for instance? She is very handsome, and she has fine diamonds. She ought to be invited to grand houses."

"I have not met Mrs. Longford at any of the houses where I go."

"I suppose she is not good enough for your friends. But the lady on the grand tier, the beautiful widow you admire, Lady Beaumont. She is a finer lady than Mrs. Longford, though she dresses so plainly. You may have met her."

"Yes. I have been in the same house with Lady Beaumont, but I was not presented to her. She left as I entered. I saw her cross the hall on the way to her carriage. I wish I had been earlier at the party."

"What a sigh!" cried Fanny. "You say you are never in love except on the stage; yet I believe you have a romantic passion for Lady Beaumont."

"No, Miss Fountain, only a strong curiosity—'which, quar-

tered, is three-parts vanity.' I cannot help being touched by a serious attention to my acting that is ever so far above the praise of an ordinary audience."

"Just because she is handsome and aristocratic."

"I do not know that she is aristocratic, and I am not even sure that she is handsome; but I know there is something in her face that I have seen in no other."

"Which means that you are in love with her. You must be a child in simplicity if you don't recognise the symptoms."

She turned away from him with a thin laugh, which changed to a sob when she was out of earshot. She knew all the symptoms. She had been in love a good many times, and her loves had ended happily and unhappily; innocently enough for the most part, for she had grown to graceful womanhood without having left off being a child. But she told herself she had never known real love till she met Godwin. It was her delight to muse over the memory of their first meetings—the disconsolate figure waiting about in the hall, the pale, proud face, and the ready-made overcoat; their first rehearsal, and his aloofness—a kind of stern courtesy that kept her at an immense distance. Never before had she failed to charm. She expected a man to be at her feet an hour after he was introduced to her. And here was a man who could act with her night after night, in scenes of romantic passion, and yet remain on terms of coldest ceremony. Sometimes he was even rude.

"Why do you always call me Miss Fountain?" she exclaimed one day, after a longer conversation than usual. "All my friends in the company call me Fanny."

"You are too kind, and I fear you have too many friends in the company."

"That is very ill-natured of you."

"I respect you too much to think Stormont or Campion—or even Campion's wife—good enough to be your friends."

"Oh, I know they are queer fish. Stormont and Campion drink; but so does Sheridan, and so do other great people. Mrs. Campion had a curious history before her marriage, but she is fond of me. I like people who like me, Mr. Godwin, and I hate people who don't," she concluded, flashing blue lightning at him from angry eyes.

She had these flashes of temper sometimes when she was talking with him; but for the most part she was gentle, and fed him with sweet flattery that would have turned a weaker man's head, and captured his heart.

Godwin's ideal woman was of another kind, remote and inaccessible, a woman who had her own dream-life, as he had his, and would be slow to come down to earth. He had read Keats, and it was the Moon-Goddess he could have worshipped, not Lamia.

His life in that first year of success was over-full. The theatre was paramount, the one absorbing care—he was to act in the provinces—Edinburgh, Glasgow, York, Leeds, Bath, and Bristol,—in the summer. He had tempting offers from America; but when he saw Sarah Merritt's horror at the idea of the Atlantic between her and her son, he gave up the notion of acting in another hemisphere. He was absolutely indifferent about money, and it was hardly worth while hunting for more laurels in a new world, while the old world was still crowning him.

He wrote to the Rev. Patrick O'Brien before he crossed to Kingstown, begging that kind friend of his boyhood to visit him at his hotel on St. Stephen's Green.

Those were days when letters travelled slowly, and there were no electric wires to flash a thought from China to Peru. The Rev. Patrick burst into Godwin's sitting-room at the "Shelbourne" before the postman had brought his letter of acceptance.

"I didn't let the grass grow under me feet after I got your invitation," he said. "I packed me carpet-bag in a brace of shakes, and here I am to spend a parson's week wid ye. Ah, my boy, you don't know how proud I am of you."

The two men stood looking at each other, the burly Irishman of eight-and-thirty, the slender youth of twenty-three, and the eyes of both were dim.

They clasped hands in silence.

"I shall never forget how much I owe you," Godwin said quietly.

"Owe me? Not a stiver. Your mother paid me like an honourable woman; and though it wasn't much for a B.A. of Trinity to get with a pupil, it was much for her to pay; and—bedad, Godwin—it was much for me to receive, for it kept me in shoe-leather. I might have worn rotten boots in our Forest walks, if it hadn't been for my forty-shilling pupil."

"All the money we've spent on the war wouldn't have paid for what you gave your forty-shilling pupil. I think my mother was inspired when she sat in Lyndhurst Church and made up her mind that you were to be my tutor."

"Your mother is a wonderful woman. You and she are together still, I hope?"



"We are not likely to part. She shared my seven hard years with the patience of a martyr. We are prospering now, thank God, and she is happy."

"Happy, and mighty proud of you, no doubt."

"She has seen my dream come true. But here's fresh coffee, and another dish of herrings, and you ought to be hungry after your journey."

"It is a long way from Limerick, through the Bog of Allen. But it was a warm night, and the stars were shining all the way, and I had a good seat behind the driver. Yes, I'm ready for breakfast, when I've gratified my eyes with another look at you. How splendid ye are, my boy; the pink of fashion. Sure that coat was made by the first tailor in London, and the Prince Regent couldn't tie a cravat better. Oh, the fine gentleman! I'll wager you've got a valet."

"I have a man who travels with me—my dresser."

"You're a prince. That it should come to this! Well, my dear young friend, I rejoice in your good fortune, though it makes a poor parson in a God-forsaken parish in the South of Ireland feel mighty small."

"Tell me all about your parish."

"Oh, it's a fine parish, a spacious parish. I have to ride nine Irish miles to a sick parishioner, and three of the miles are on the skirts of a bog. It's a fine parish for pigs, and a fine country for landscape-painters and snipe, and a fine river for salmon; but if a man wants people to talk to he must go somewhere else."

"But you must have some gentry in your neighbourhood."

"Half a dozen squireens, who are never happy without a gun or a salmon-rod in their hands, and whose chief pleasure is to poach on one another's land, or run away with one another's daughters. As to looking inside a book, I don't believe one of 'em is ever guilty of it."

"I'm afraid you're no longer in love with your Green Isle."

"I'm just bored to death, and if I hadn't a good horse and a good gun I think I should have cut my throat before now."

"Then you're as fond of sport as your neighbours the squireens," said Godwin.

"If a man can't get exercise for his mind, he must find occupation for his body. I ride thirty miles three days a week, and I'm up to my waist in the river on the other three. I keep hunger out of many a hovel with the spoil of my rod, and for company in the evenings I have the popish priest, whose talk is mostly of the penal laws under which Irish Catholics are worse

off than felons in Botany Bay, and abuse of old King George, and all the ministers who are against Catholic Emancipation."

"Then I take it you've had enough of Ireland?"

"And to spare. I sometimes wish I was back in Hampshire—a curate-in-charge, and 'passing rich on forty pounds a year.'"

"Why not in London?"

"London! Sure it's the Paradise I dream of many a night. I take the sound of the water rushing over the weir for the roll of carriage wheels in the Strand, and the squeal of my pigs for the hawkers' crying their goods in the street."

"Come to London, O'Brien. You can get somebody to take your duty for a few weeks, I suppose. Come and spend a month in Bedford Square. There's a good room at your service, and my mother will make you comfortable. I needn't say how glad I shall be of your company. I shall have finished my Irish engagements—Cork, Waterford, and Belfast—in three or four weeks, and we can go to London together."

Mr. O'Brien did not need pressing. He had been fond of the boy, Godwin, and he was proud of the success that had set his quondam pupil on a pinnacle.

"Faith, I always thought you a wonder," he said, "and I oughtn't to be surprised that you've taken London by storm. It was an eye-opener for me when I read of your first appearance at Drury Lane; and then a week later came your warm-hearted letter, and I was proud to think you remembered an old friend in the flush of your success. But why didn't you write to me in all those years before you came to London? I often thought of you, and wondered if my marvellous boy had perished in his pride; for that's just the kind of boy who does sometimes perish—worse luck. But here you are, strong as a young lion, and handsome and happy."

"Quite happy," Godwin answered gravely. "My dream has come true."

"Then you're not in love. Not always thinking about the inexpressive she. Not worried and plagued by a woman's airs and graces, and hot fits and cold fits."

"No, I'm not in love—except with Desdemona."

"Not with your Drury Lane Desdemona, the Prince's divinity."

"What? Has that old story found its way to Ireland? Poor Fanny Fountain! She's a feather-headed creature—a grown-up child. But there's no harm in her."

"Not a bit. What's the harm in riding in a curricule with a Royal Highness? It was an old story, no doubt. But the Dublin

papers had it all pat when she played Ophelia to your Hamlet. They had a lot to say about the lady ; how she was a Cornish parson's daughter, who ran away from her father's vicarage to go on the stage, beautiful as the morning, and made a prodigious success as Juliet, and turned the Prince's head. His friends called him Romeo ever after. But that was a good many years ago ; and though the lady might have been only seventeen then—she must be fat, fair, and forty by now—and that is the kind of woman the Prince admires, they say, so I suppose he is Romeo still."

"Miss Fountain is not more than seven-and-twenty, and for grace and prettiness she is an ideal Ophelia."

"I'm afraid you are in love with her."

"Not I, my dear friend ; but I don't like to hear a woman slandered. You will see her at the theatre when you come to London, and you can judge for yourself. She lives very quietly with a maiden aunt in a small house at the West End. I have never been inside her house, or exchanged half a dozen words with her outside the theatre, though she insisted upon visiting my mother—an act of patronage that neither of us desired."

"I see, you are *not* in love with her. It is only your chivalry that flames up in her defence. My dear, dear boy, I'm afraid you are too romantic for the traffic of this wicked world."

Patrick O'Brien spent a parson's week at the Shelbourne Hotel, and saw his forty-shilling pupil in three of his finest parts—Hamlet, Richard, and Othello—and burnt with rapture at the genius of the boy he loved. For him Godwin would always be the boy, and he thrilled with delight as he surveyed the theatre crowded from floor to ceiling, and the boxes sparkling with women of the highest fashion. Everybody of note in Dublin came to see the new actor whose talent had turned the fortunes of Drury Lane, and whom critics of the first importance had written about in terms of unmeasured laudation. What more could be written about a man than that he was the finest actor in the world, and that his genius had made a revolution in dramatic art ? The same things had been written about Garrick, no doubt, and perhaps about Macklin ; but Macklin and Garrick were ancient history, and this man was alive—young, handsome, romantic, and he had the world at his feet.

When he had finished his Irish engagements he went to the village by the Shannon for a week's rest in his friend's parsonage, after sending the earnings of his tour to Mrs. Merritt, for her to

carry to Child's Bank—piles of Irish notes, which Sarah wept over, remembering old Elspeth's prophecy.

The gold had come, in Dublin as in London; gold in heaps. Would that other thing that the old woman had foreseen come true?

"No, no, no," Sarah told herself, as she counted the notes. "It was all nonsense—just a fortune-teller's jargon."

"They always promise piles of money," Sarah thought; and if Elspeth went beyond the fortune-teller's usual formula, and pretended to see death—an untimely death—in Godwin's hand, it was just the perverse delight of a vain old woman, in pretending to supernatural powers—a sour old woman who liked to frighten people.

Sarah hurried off in a hackney coach to the bank, and paid the Irish money to Godwin's deposit account. The money in his current account ran through his fingers as if it were water. Sarah thought him hopeless in his use of money; lavish in generosity, and expensive in his habits. She was glad that Mr. O'Brien was coming on a visit to the fine old house, as she counted on his good influence.

There was one prudential act of this young spendthrift which Sarah did not know.

He had sunk the receipts of his Drury Lane benefit on the purchase of an annuity for his mother. Whatever happened to him in the near or distant future, she would have enough to live upon. And before he was much older he meant to buy that cottage on Wimbledon Common which he had talked about.

Mr. O'Brien was received in Bedford Square with all honour, Sarah herself conducting him to the spare bedroom, with a pardonable pride in its spaciousness and handsome furniture. But what the Irishman most admired was the spotless cleanliness and perfect order in the room, a perfection which he had found rare in the mansions of the sister isle.

"My mother is the most indefatigable housekeeper in the world," Godwin said. "I believe she does all the work of this house, while her stout country wenches look on and wonder at her."

"She looks well and happy," O'Brien answered cheerily, "so the work is not doing her any harm."

Patrick O'Brien made himself at home in the big house, and the friendship that had begun with the boy of twelve ripened and became a close bond between the man of mature years and the actor of twenty-three. Godwin had made many ac-

quaintances since his success, but he had made no intimate friend. That close confidence and familiar intercourse which form an ideal friendship could not exist between the young man whose mind was given wholly to his art, and the men of the world who admired him, and who were as busy and keenly interested in their own particular work as he was in the drama. It was to the man who had led his childish steps into the world of the intellect that he could open his mind freely. His companionship with Patrick O'Brien had been easy and natural when he was a nameless urchin of twelve years old. It was just as natural and easy now when he was three-and-twenty, and all London was running after him.

Those four weeks in Bedford Square were a season of delight for the Irish parson. He was in the pit at Drury Lane at every performance of Godwin's; he was admitted to that inner sanctuary of dramatic art, the green-room; and it was there that he made his first acquaintance with Godwin's distinguished friends, which ripened later in the Sunday dinner-parties in Bedford Square; for Godwin's small and intimate Sunday dinners were now as famous as his suppers after the play, and there was no more brilliant conversation in London society than the familiar talk at the actor's table; where all things in heaven and earth were discussed by some of the brightest spirits of the age, and where the company rarely separated until the small hours. Indeed there was one famous symposium when the September sun flung his fierce morning red across the board, where Samuel Taylor Coleridge was still expounding platonic philosophy.

Godwin was not without a motive in the pains he took to bring O'Brien to the notice of his most distinguished friends. They were men who were in power, and who could do anything for a struggling cleric, if they had a liking for him. Godwin brought the thing about in the easiest way, and when it was known that he wanted the parson from Limerick to be established in London, it was not long before the opportunity was found. The Duchess who had given him his dog did not rest till she had obtained preferment for his friend. She canvassed all her acquaintance, and finally discovered a rich City merchant whose property lay within the sound of Bow Bells, and who had a living in his gift, a cure of souls which now happened to be vacant, as the last incumbent had only recently obtained unexpected preferment to a rural parish, with a larger stipend and a smaller congregation. St. Elfrida's was one of Wren's



churches, the ornament of a retired nook between Gresham Street and Cheapside.

O'Brien found that his forty-shilling pupil was now the spoilt child of Fortune, and that his wish was like a royal command.

"You are marvellous—a miracle of genius," O'Brien said to him as they sat on each side of the dying fire, smoking meditative cigars, after one of those Sunday parties. "What can I do but wonder when I see you sitting at this table looking down the line of great men—great in statesmanship, in art, and letters—wits and philosophers, playwrights and critics, men as different as Hazlitt and Coleridge, as Lord Bayswater and Tommy Moore—and holding your own against them all, never nonplussed, never at a disadvantage? You seem to know everything. The scrap of education that I was able to give you could not go very far, and yet you are always equal to the occasion, and I have never seen you worsted in an argument. Is it your quiet smile, or the sparkle of malicious wit in your eye that hoodwinks us all?"

"Your scrap of education was more than you think, my dear O'Brien. You opened the gate. I had a good deal of idle time in my seven years' apprenticeship—long nights when I went to bed too hungry to sleep—and I thought about things, about many of the things these clever friends of mine love to talk about. No man can know Shakespeare—who knew everything—without learning to think. There's hardly a line of his that doesn't offer stuff for long thoughts. I had my own notion of the universe, and I measured it against other men's notions. When I had a few pence to spare I hunted the threepenny box outside the bookshop for something worth buying; and as I could seldom afford that luxury, I read my shabby little books over and over again."

"Faix, that's why you were able to quote Coleridge against himself t'other night."

"Yes, I got an odd volume of 'The Friend' for twopence. It was bound in morocco—quite a handsome book. Nobody wanted it."

"Dry-as-dust stuff! And when they talked of Goethe on Hamlet you were just as ready."

"'Wilhelm Meister' in English was one of my threepennies, about the toughest."

"Oh, it's the marvellous boy you are, Godwin!"

The Duchess came next day with the appointment to St. Elfrida in her reticule; and she carried Godwin and O'Brien

off in her chariot to look at the vicarage, which was a funny little house in a court behind the church, with ample space for a bachelor, but not much room for a family.

"You mustn't be in a hurry to marry, Mr. O'Brien," the Duchess said gaily.

"Does your grace think I'd rush into trouble?"

"Your business in London will be to take care of your old pupil, and see that he doesn't give away all his money, or spoil his health by late hours."

"I'll do my best, Duchess; but I'm a sinner myself in the last matter. I love an after-midnight ramble in city streets, and to watch the waning moon rise over the river—the feeble old moon—golden still, but out of shape, and looking the worse for late hours. Sure, Duchess, you don't forget my dear little countryman's verse—

'And the best of all ways  
To lengthen our days  
Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear.'"

"The master is just as bad as the pupil!" cried her grace.

When she had peered into the dusty rooms, the Duchess told O'Brien that she had plenty of discarded furniture in her great, rambling house in St. James's Square, furniture which was good of its kind, and at Mr. O'Brien's service, if he would be so amiable as to accept it.

"The things are only old-fashioned, and got crowded out when I took a fancy to a newer style," she said, and the Irish parson found that only to be a friend of Godwin's was to have benefits showered upon one.

The Reverend Patrick went back to county Limerick with a light heart. He had only to wait upon his bishop, surrender his cure, take leave of his family, and return to London, which was just now his idea of Paradise. Godwin saw him safe on board the packet that was to carry him to Waterford, a longish passage, and a roughish boat—but O'Brien was much too happy to care about small hardships.

## CHAPTER X

THE Duchess of Pentland had constituted herself Godwin's fairy godmother. She was always trying some new device for making his life pleasant—and it was a mercy, Sarah thought, that there was only one set of muddy paws to spoil the chair-covers in Bedford Square, for, if her grace had been permitted, a pug, a poodle, and a Blenheim spaniel would have disputed Godwin's favour with Hector.

Godwin had to tell his duchess that for him a dog friend was a serious matter; that he would not for worlds have allowed Hector to think that any four-legged creature could come between him and his master.

"That's a pity," said her grace. "What will Hector do when you marry? Poor beast! He'll just die of jealousy."

"I'm as far from marriage as from the moon," Godwin said.

"That's what every young man thinks—till Destiny taps him on the shoulder, like a bailiff, and says, 'Here's your wife!'"

"Destiny can do nothing till the man is in love."

"And are you as far from love as you are from the moon?"

"I think so."

"Oh, you only think so. Then I smell fire! How about the lady shareholder who is in her box every night to see you act?"

"She is a woman of business, and comes to see how the theatre is prospering."

"Hypocrite! You know you don't think so."

"If she comes to see me act she would do as much for a rope-dancer or performing elephants."

"Hypocrite again! Have you not told me about her face—a wonderful countenance—a face full of thought? Women with such faces don't take a pleasure in rope-dancers or elephants. You forget the moment of expansion in which you gave me a glimpse of your mind. I won't insist that you are in love, but I know that Lady Beaumont's beauty has made a deep impression."

"Is she beautiful?"

"People say she is. But I am not over-fond of her. She is as proud as Lucifer—and she has an odious brother. She was one of the Perthshire Crawfords—an old Scottish family—papists to the marrow of their bones, who have lived on their own land, and despised other people, since the Bruce was king. She was educated at Louvain, and at Port Royal in Paris, and her brother was reared by French Jesuits, and has an ugly history. If you would like to meet her, I'll manage it somehow. But I warn you, my dear friend, that for your own happiness you had better fall in love with somebody else."

Godwin brooded upon the Duchess's warning in the watches of the night. Why should this woman be more dangerous to his peace than other women? Proud as Lucifer! There was the peril. She would look down upon a stage-player from an unspeakable distance. She might be interested in his acting. His Hamlet, his Othello, might be her delight—but the man—the real man behind the poet's phantasm would be a bit of dirt—just common clay—a creature outside her sphere, with whose thoughts and feelings she could have no sympathy. Was it not better for him that she should never see him away from the glamour of the stage lights? Let her think of him in his fictitious characters, and never have the chance of despising him.

Spoilt as he had been by the friendship of the great—and accustomed to take his place among them on equal terms—the actor was not blind to the feeling of caste in the most liberal-minded of his friends. A word, a tone, in talking of other people, had shown him that sense of superior birth which was an integral part of their minds. Dukes and earls might marry actresses. A Bolton, a Peterborough, a Derby, might stoop without losing caste, but when Mrs. Thrale married a foreign musician, all society shrieked at her disgrace. Knowing this, how could Godwin desire to meet a woman who would be slow to believe that an actor could be a gentleman?

Then, perhaps for the first time, the mystery of his birth made a dark spot in his mind. He had never questioned Sarah Merritt about his parentage. He loved her too well to ask a question that might pain her. Whatever her history might be, whatever she might have suffered from the iniquity of man, he knew that she was a good woman, honest and pure-minded and truthful, and he would not awaken bitter memories by the faintest hint of a desire to know more. She had been his first and only friend for twenty-three years of his life, and what lay behind the beginning of those years was her business, not his. Yet to-day,

at the prospect of meeting Lady Beaumont, the cloud upon his birth became an intolerable pain.

He remembered how she had passed him that night at Bayswater House, with no sign of recognition in those serious eyes, which looked at him with the same far-off look that she gave to the pictures on the wall. For the actor she had eyes brilliant with excited feeling—or dim with tears. For the man she had indifference so complete that it looked like disdain.

The mystery of his birth began to trouble him, and his mind went back to a night in his first season, when his Richard had raised enthusiasm to fever point, and when at the end of the play, while he was still in his stage clothes, he was surprised by the entrance of a stranger who came into his dressing-room unannounced, a man of middle-age, handsome, distinguished, who wore a ribbon and star, no less a personage than Lord Clontarf, a man who held a high place in the political world, statesman and orator, and whose portrait was familiar to Godwin in the print-shops of the West End.

"You must forgive me for taking you by storm, Mr. Godwin," he said. "I came from the House only in time to see your last act. There was, indeed, some talk of adjourning at seven o'clock, in order that we might all come to the theatre—but the clodhoppers were against that—and I had to stay and speak. I have seen all the famous Richards in the last thirty years—but I never saw the splendid devil Shakespeare drew until to-night. Your passion of hatred and despair was unsurpassable for force and grandeur. I am proud—very proud"—he paused some moments, looking at Godwin earnestly, and making a curious break in the sentence—"that England has produced such an actor."

Godwin acknowledged the statesman's praise with a grave courtesy. He was already accustomed to compliments from great people, and could receive them with infinite ease. Their raptures meant very little for him, since they often praised him when he had fallen short of his own ideals. He had no value for compliments that he thought undeserved. He was his own severest critic.

There was a silence, but the visitor lingered, to Godwin's surprise, as he seemed to have nothing more to say, and then he said abruptly :—

"I have friends who are intimate with you, Mr. Godwin, and your house has been pointed out to me. I have been told that you live with your mother."



" Yes, my mother and I have been close companions from my infancy."

" A widow ? "

" Yes. She could not have been so much to me if she had been encumbered with a husband."

" Would you have thought a father an encumbrance ? "

" It would have depended upon the father."

" And you never knew your father ? "

" No, my lord. I do not even know his name."

" Have you no curiosity about your parentage ? "

" None."

" That is strange."

" You would hardly think so, my lord, if you knew my history. Till I came to London I had but one friend in the world—the mother who gave her whole life to the task of rearing me. If my father is alive I have no interest in finding him. Having lived three-and-twenty years without a father, there is no reason I should want one now. I was fatherless from my birth, and shall go fatherless to my grave."

" You have an implacable and revengeful disposition, Mr. Godwin."

" Implacable, perhaps, not revengeful. The wrong I suffered as a nameless child will never be forgotten," Godwin answered gravely.

He and his visitor were standing side by side in front of the looking-glass which covered one wall of the dressing-room. The two faces looked at each other in the glass—the two figures were of the same height, and the same slender build. Fatigue, premature age, the sickness of life, were in one face—in the other youth, strong feeling, and an indomitable pride.

" Good-bye, Mr. Godwin. We are travellers on different roads, and we may never meet again." The man with the star left the room, accompanied to the door by the actor, who stood erect and motionless, holding the door open till his visitor was lost in the darkness of the corridor.

## CHAPTER XI

THE Duchess of Pentland was one of the restless spirits that can let nothing sleep. Having promised to bring Godwin and Lady Beaumont together, she could not be satisfied till the thing was done ; and within a few days of their conversation, he received one of her grace's friendly little notes.

" I am having some music after dinner to-morrow, *mon ami*, and your charmer promises to come. It will be a small party, and you can make an opportunity for talking to her. Never mind if the brother scowls at you. He has nothing left of his foreign education but a sneer and a scowl. The Jesuits would have taught him better manners if he had been teachable : but the creature is made of bad stuff.

" À vous de grand cœur,

" URSULA PENTLAND."

The music was nearly over when Godwin went up the great staircase in St. James's Square. He had felt a curious reluctance in going to meet a woman whose personality had made a profound impression upon him. That calm and beautiful countenance had taken hold of his mind. It had helped him in his acting to see Lady Beaumont in her place night after night, and to know that her thoughts were with him through all the magic of the scene—that she alone perhaps, among that crowded audience could rise to the height of his divine Shakespeare. He was in another and a higher world when he was acting ; and he felt that she belonged to that other world. To know her, to talk to her of futile things, to be coldly received, perhaps, and made to feel his distance ? Would it not break the spell ?

He went late, half hoping that she might pass him in the hall, as she had done before—yet his heart-beats were agitated as he went upstairs, and heard the Duchess's reproaches.

" I take so much trouble for you, and you cannot even come till my party is nearly over. Lady Beaumont would have left before now if she were not passionately fond of music."

"She is fond of everything beautiful," Godwin said with conviction.

"You think so because she admires your acting. You have behaved very badly. Our Hamlet is getting spoilt by adulation."

"Ah, Duchess, if you knew why I came late!"

"Why am I not told?"

"You would laugh at me. Do you believe in omens?"

"I am a Scotswoman."

"I walked about my rooms for nearly an hour, moving in a dark shadow, irresolute, miserable; I felt as if a bony hand took hold of my arm, and a voice hissed in my ear—Don't go! I had an intuition that to come here to-night was to take the first step on a dark road—leading God knows where—but to nothing happy. Yet I am here."

The Duchess struck him on the shoulder with her fan. "Shall I tell you what it all means? You are in love—over head and ears in love. Come—you are not the kind of man who fears his fate too much. She has just gone into the red drawing-room. My prima donna is going to supper, and will sing no more. You can talk at your ease."

He followed his duchess into an inner drawing-room, where there were only about a dozen people, in friendly groups, absorbed in their own conversation. Lady Beaumont was talking to one of the Italian singers, who left her as the Duchess approached and presented "Mr. Godwin, whose acting has given you so much pleasure."

The smile that acknowledged the introduction was coldly polite. No enthusiasm for the young man in the dark blue dress coat, and frilled shirt. This was not Hamlet. Yet the face was Hamlet's; very pale, with the dark hair falling loosely over the splendid brow.

They talked of indifferent things—of the Italian soprano whose bird-like *floritura* Godwin had missed. She was to appear at the Opera on the following evening. The public had not yet heard her; and it was a privilege for the Duchess of Pentland to have her before her début.

"I dare say she was thinking about to-morrow while she was singing," said Lady Beaumont. "Measuring her public success by the effect she made upon us. It must be a terrible ordeal, that first appearance at a great theatre, with all London listening and watching. But you seemed hardly conscious of your audience when you played Hamlet, that wretched winter night, to that scanty house."

"Were you there?" Godwin asked, with a faint tremor in his voice.

"I was there—for a sordid reason. I had a pecuniary interest in your success. The theatre was being carried on at a loss, and the shareholders were all pining for the great actor who was to turn loss into profit. I sat in my box and shivered, while the wind came in at every door, and fluttered the playbills in the pit. I was prepared for another disappointment. But the Phoenix—so often expected—had come at last, and I knew our luck had turned. How was it that you could dismiss every thought of your audience, every anxiety about the effect you were making? Success or failure must have been a matter of some importance."

"It was life or death. I had worked and waited for seven years; and that night was to decide my fate."

She went on to express her appreciation of that first performance, and she talked as one who understood the play, and could perceive the finest shades in the actor's impersonation.

Godwin heard her with lowered eyelids, and a cold, calm face. He felt that she was talking to him from a height, as a stage-player who had amused her; not as a man whom she wanted to make her friend.

She said no word about his life off the stage, asked no questions. For her his personality began and ended with those sublime creations, Hamlet, Othello, Richard. Where he had lived, what were his kindred, and how he had come to be the actor he was, were questions that had no interest. For her, Godwin, the man, was non-existent.

He could not be unconscious of this, remembering his other admirers; his Duchess, *par exemple*, who had wanted to know all about himself, his likings and dislikings, his childhood and youth; who had been kind and cordial to his homely mother; who had been keenly interested in the details of his domestic life, and who was always trying to make him happy.

But the Duchess of Pentland was grey-haired and elderly, with a feeble old Duke in the background to whom she was an angel of goodness, but for whom she could do very little. There was ample room in the Duchess's kindly heart for friendship—even with so poor a thing as a stage-player.

Lady Beaumont was of another sphere. Young, beautiful, and very proud. Friendship for her would only be possible under the severest social laws. Her friend must be a man of equal rank, a man whom she might marry without losing caste, if friendship should drift into love.

While he sat in silence, thinking of that wide gulf, that improbability of the distance ever being bridged over, a man came across the room and seated himself next Lady Beaumont, and began to talk to her, almost in a whisper.

This was the scowling brother, the dark face Godwin had seen in the background, when he looked through the hole in the curtain. This was the brother who had missed being a priest.

Godwin rose quickly, and would have taken leave with a distant bow, but the lady gave him her hand.

"Good night," she said. "I hope to see you in all your impersonations. My brother thinks it is a sin to enter a theatre, yet even he was at your first performance of Othello."

The brother was leaning forward, frowning at the carpet.

"My sister has a great opinion of the actor who has mended the fortunes of the theatre," he said. "Fine ladies who pretend to be romantic have sometimes a keen eye to the main chance."

Godwin took no notice of the speech or the speaker. He bent for a moment over the slender hand that lay in his own, before he left the room.

His duchess was on the landing, bidding people good night, but she insisted on taking Godwin to the supper-room, where he sat at her table while she trifled with the wing of a chicken, and sipped a glass of champagne.

"Well," she said, "are you satisfied?"

"Yes, Duchess, quite satisfied."

"That means disenchanted? You don't admire her?"

"What would happen to me if I did?"

"Disappointment, vexation of spirit. I wanted you to meet her—for then I thought you would understand the case. An ocular demonstration is better than a world of talk. I know the woman. You might as well look for warmth in Greenland as for a heart in her."

"It is an exquisite form, and there is a heart inside—for the man who can find it. Don't be afraid, Duchess, I am not the man to try to make a proud woman love me."

"She might do worse than fall in love with genius," said the Duchess. "She has been spoilt by too much money and too much beauty. She married a man old enough to be her father—to please her family—and he worshipped her, and left her a fine fortune. The men all run after her, first because she is handsome, next because she is rich, and most of all because she keeps them



at a distance. In an age of easy conquests, the inaccessible woman is queen. She has never been in love, does not know what love means."

Godwin's ramble through the deserted streets was longer than usual that night. The church clocks struck two while he stood on Westminster Bridge looking dreamily along the river, where the lamps upon the shore showed pale through the mists of night. And in all his rambling in the labyrinth of streets Lady Beaumont's image had gone with him, and the problem of her existence had been in his thoughts. Was she the human iceberg the Duchess thought her? Or was there a passionate heart under that calm and lovely bosom? Her face had impressed itself upon his mind while he talked with her—every line, every look, the lifting of pencilled brows, interrogative or sarcastic, the curve of a proud upper lip. Nothing could be forgotten. An iceberg, or a woman with a heart? That was the question.

There had been a softness in her eyes that tempered the scornful lip; and when her eyelids drooped as she listened, the face became thoughtful and sweet.

She had given him a kind smile as she offered him her hand. Well, if they never met again he would carry her image to the grave, and his memory of her should be precious. But she should not come between him and his art. He had no room in his life for the pangs of a despised love.

After that evening in St. James's Square he had to harden his heart against a distracting influence. His first glance when he came upon the stage was at Lady Beaumont's box. Was she there? Was she not there?

To see her face looking down at him was to feel inspired. His heart sank if her place was empty, and for some moments he knew that he was acting at half power. Then the strong will asserted itself, and he looked for the face no more. The passion of the scene took hold of him; and—as in all his impersonations—he forgot that there was any other world, except this where words were fire.

Later, perhaps, he heard the curtain-rings run along the brass rod in the box above him, and he knew that she had come, and that those thoughtful eyes were watching him. He knew, but he forbade himself to look—forbade himself to think of her. The man might have entered upon a new phase of life; but the actor was still paramount.

It was some time after the Duchess's party, and that kind

lady was nursing her old husband in his ancestral castle in the Lowlands, and writing to Godwin occasionally by way of distraction.

"I should be moped to death if I had not you and two or three other friends to write to me about the world of living people," she told him. "My dear old Duke is as near extinction as a man can be and yet think himself alive, and most of my days are spent by his arm-chair. He was once so full of life—ready to fight a duel before breakfast, or after supper, buying pictures—playing cards—breeding racehorses—doing and daring everything that may become a man; and now it is all over—and we are going slowly down into the valley of the shadow. Why is life so short, Godwin, and sometimes so sad? I had a son who would have been as old as you if he had lived till yesterday—his birthday. He died in his cradle—and I had another who lived to be four years old, and the joy of my life. My only daughter made a miserable marriage—and died an hour after a baby that never lived. When Pentland and I are gone the name will vanish with us—the end of an old song. Now you may understand the delight your genius has given me, and my sincere affection for you. A woman of sixty-five may write of affection for a man of three-and-twenty, without a blush; though if I had not my dear old Duke in the background malevolent people might say I wanted to marry you. What you have given me is an interest outside my own life—which has grown dark and narrow since my husband's broken health cut off many sources of interest. You may never perhaps have heard that he had weight and influence in the political world, ten years ago."

This was the most confidential letter the Duchess had ever written to him, and Godwin was deeply moved by it; yet, though he was touched by the kindness and pathos of the letter, he was more perturbed by the postscript.

"Lady Beaumont has gone to Rome for the winter."

There was trouble in the theatre just now, trouble about Fanny Fountain. The actress's vogue had been waning for some time. She was losing the girlish freshness and the joyous spirits which had made her greatest charm. She had never had more talent than just carried her through the juvenile lead without offence. As Juliet in the year when she was new to the stage, and all London was talking about her, it was her beauty and not her acting that had taken the town. Never had there been so young, so lovely a Juliet. She went through

the potion scene with a sweet simplicity, like a frightened child. There could have been nothing more natural than her terrified cry when she called the nurse back to her; nothing feebler than her desperation when she drank the potion. But now she had been a good many seasons at Drury Lane, and the Committee—made avaricious by financial success—began to think that she was costing them too much. They had bid high for her when they wanted to get her away from the Kembles, and her salary was larger than that of any other actress in the theatre. A certain Miss Latimer, of the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, had made a promising first appearance. She was six years younger than Miss Fountain, experienced, handsome in a large, highly coloured style, and full of ambition. She had made a strong impression upon her audience by her queenly appearance and dignity as Goneril, and had made a hit as Emilia. She was dying to play Fanny Fountain's characters; but that was impossible while Fanny was in the theatre. The Committee called upon Harvey to get them out of the difficulty. They were bound by an agreement, which could only be cancelled with Miss Fountain's consent.

"I'll put up 'Macbeth,'" said Harvey. "Godwin is ready for it. Fountain will insist upon her right to play Lady Macbeth, which she is as fit for as I am for Admiral of the Fleet. I'll see you through it, gentlemen."

Harvey was equal to the situation. No sooner was it known that Miss Latimer was to have the leading part in the next production than Fanny Fountain marched into his room one evening, and attacked him with indignant speech and angry tears. It was after the first act of "Richard the Third," and she was in her stage dress as Lady Anne. Hard things were said on both sides; and hysterical sobs and angry oaths were heard by those who happened to be passing the manager's door while the interview was in progress—a tragic and stormy interview, ending in a terrible calm. Fanny was deadly pale when she came out of the stage-manager's den.

Harvey told the Committee next day that it had been the worst quarter of an hour he had ever had in that dull business room of his—though those walls had seen many a fierce encounter between manager and actor. But he had done the trick. He had argued Miss Fountain into a position in which she could not do less than cancel her engagement. She would not act another night in that detestable theatre after the revival of "Richard the Third" was finished. The piece had been played

three times a week for a month, and might run for another twelve nights.

She went to Godwin's dressing-room after the first act, and begged for admittance. He heard the sob in her voice, and admitted her at once. He had no change of costume till later in the play.

He drew a chair to the fire, and she sat down, looking about her forlornly.

"What a fine room," she exclaimed.

"It is a little better than the room I shared with Stormont and Campion."

"Hateful beasts. Oh, you are king in this theatre now. But you don't know how badly your subjects are treated." And then, in a torrent of words, she told him how infamously Harvey had behaved. The things that he had said, the shameful things! What could be more shameful than to hint that she was no longer the sylph she had been when she played Juliet; that the creature, Susan Latimer—a grocer's daughter, as ignorant as dirt—was a better actress, and a more effective beauty? "I told him I was a gentleman's daughter, and that I was never made for this odious profession; that if I had known the wretches I should have to associate with, I would never have entered his dirty theatre."

"Can I be of any use in the matter?" Godwin asked kindly, when she had left off talking, and had composed herself a little. "Shall I talk to the Committee? I might make them understand how unfairly they are treating you."

"Not for worlds. I would not cheapen myself so much, if there were not another theatre in England. They will be glad to have me at Covent Garden—or there is Bath—there is York. If I am stale and superfluous here, I should be new at either of those theatres, and should soon be a favourite!"

"Naturally. Bath is a charming place. I should recommend Bath rather than Covent Garden."

"You mean the Kembles don't want me," she flashed at him angrily.

Perhaps she saw the underlying thought in his advice, the desire to spare her the chance of a refusal.

"I mean that Bath is delightful in winter, and full of rank and fashion. To be a favourite at the Theatre Royal, Bath, is an excellent position."

"You mean that the Kembles don't want me," she repeated, stamping her foot, and beginning to cry. Her shrillness and

that stamp of her foot brought Hector from his rug under the dressing-table. He stood a little way off, watching the turbulent lady, with a low growl, scenting an enemy.

"Take that beast away," she cried, "or he will do me some mischief. The brute has always hated me."

A word from Godwin sent the terrier back to his lair.

"Pray don't cry, Miss Fountain," he said gently. "You make me miserable."

"No, I don't. You don't care twopence. You are looking at the clock while you talk to me."

"I must be on the stage in five minutes. Don't be unreasonable. I want to give you the best advice I can."

"You are as bad as Harvey under your pretended kindness. You want me out of the theatre. You like that creature Latimer better than me. She is a finer actress, isn't she?" standing up and facing him angrily. "She is handsomer, she has more talent. I should be better at Bath, or York, or Timbuctoo; anywhere out of your way."

She had quite broken down now, had lost all self-control, and was sobbing hysterically.

Godwin said all that kindness could suggest. He was sincerely sorry for her; but he had to talk to her with his eye on the clock, and with his ear attentive to that march of Handel's which the orchestra were working up to a close. The call-boy had been at the door more than once while Fanny was talking.

"If there were anything I could do."

"You know there is nothing. Or you can give me a letter to the manager at Bath, or at York. That's what you would like to do."

"I must leave you. May I see you to your dressing-room?"

"No. The act has begun. I can find my own way."

She flung herself out of the room in front of him, not caring who might see her streaming eyes, her heaving breast.

It was scarcely a surprise to Godwin in the interval after the third act to hear that Miss Fountain had been seized with sudden illness, and had left the theatre without a word of explanation or apology. A young actress who played small parts was going on for Lady Anne in the fourth act.

Harvey came into the green-room in a towering rage.

"She has taken herself and her tantrums off in a hackney coach, hoping to put us into a quandary. As if there wasn't



another stick in the company equal to filling her place. She shall never enter the theatre again."

"Isn't that what you wanted?" asked Godwin. "You have treated her shamefully, and you wonder that she should have spirit enough to leave you."

"On my soul I was kind and considerate in our interview, though she dashed into my room in a towering passion, having just heard that Latimer was to play Lady Macbeth. When she threatened to leave the theatre was I to beg her to stay, knowing that the Committee wanted to get rid of her? I tried to put the matter before her from a business point of view. I had my orders from the Committee. We engaged her at an extravagant salary, when she was in the heyday of her success. A success which was made solely by her pretty face and figure—for nobody ever thought she could act—and by the attentions a certain Royal personage paid her—and now she is losing her good looks, and the Royal admirer has forgotten her. It is a happy release."

"I should be sorry to be obliged to tell you my opinion of your conduct, Mr. Harvey," Godwin said to him stiffly.

He was pale with indignant feeling, and the stage-manager had hardly more colour. Those were days when a quarrel between two men was no light matter, and Harvey was not renowned for pluck.

Godwin sent his mother to call upon Miss Fountain next morning.

"You have never returned her visit," he said, "and it will be kind to call upon her now that she is ill and unhappy."

That was enough for Sarah Merritt, who bustled off in her best beaver bonnet and cloth pelisse, to do her son's bidding.

She came back with a pitiful story of Miss Fountain's condition. The visitor had been taken up to her room, where she was still in bed, at half-past twelve, and had been breakfasting upon a devilled biscuit and a pint of champagne.

She had flung herself into Sarah's arms and cried as if her heart would break, and had repeated the story of her wrongs, with much abuse of stage-manager Harvey.

"My heart ached for the poor creature," said Sarah; "but when I saw her untidy bedroom, and her drawing-room that looked as if it hadn't been dusted for a week, I didn't wonder things had gone wrong with her. I'm afraid the inside of her

mind is just as much in a state of muddle as the inside of her house," Sarah concluded shrewdly.

"But there is an aunt. What was the aunt doing?"

"Encouraging her to finish the champagne, and paying her foolish compliments about her beauty. If you had seen the aunt's red nose, and the frayed elbows of her silk gown, you wouldn't have thought such an aunt much use or protection for a feather-headed niece."

Godwin sighed.

"Feather-headed, yes, that's the word. But in my heart of hearts I know Fanny Fountain is a good woman."

"Oh, my dearest dear, what do you know about women?" exclaimed Sarah between laughter and tears. "No more than if you had never seen one younger than old Elspeth. But, oh, whatever you do, don't fall in love with Miss Fountain."

"There's no danger of that," he answered gravely. "My ideal is as far from Miss Fountain as the stars are from the earth."

"Stick to that, Monkey; and everything I can do to help the poor thing—such as getting her a housemaid who will keep her rooms dusted—I'll do with all my heart."

Godwin's *Macbeth* was second only to his *Othello* in the enthusiasm with which it was received. The theatre was packed from floor to ceiling, and the audience was brilliant. It was early in October, but the three great tragedies, "*Lear*," "*Othello*," and "*Macbeth*," were to be played in alternate weeks till Christmas, when the reign of "*Old Mother Goose*," and the latest imitator of Joseph Grimaldi, was to begin—an uproarious and jovial reign of three or four weeks, after which Godwin and Shakespeare would be again paramount.

He had his wish. His dream had come true. Yet now, after the first rapture of a success almost unparalleled in the history of the stage, that faint, vague sense of something wanting, which is the beginning of unhappiness, had come like a cloud over his life.

Isabel Beaumont was more than a thousand miles away. Fine ladies he had met in society talked to each other behind their fans, and rustled their silks and feathers in the box where she used to sit motionless as a statue, watching him with those earnest eyes of hers, absorbed in the magic of the scene. He had schooled himself to avoid looking at her, but the knowledge that she was there had thrilled him, and all the loveliest

words he had to speak were spoken to her. There were times when the audience hardly counted, when they two might have been alone in that vast theatre.

She had gone to Italy for the winter. She was to be away half a year. He thought of the long winter that had only just begun—as if it were some dismal desert of illimitable space that he had to cross: vast distances, barrenness, and dust that choked him. All the kindness of his friends, all the social gaieties that were forced upon him, all the praises of distinguished critics, could not make him happy. The gay outer life, the visiting and entertaining; the wits and poets and politicians in the green-room; all that was so brilliant on the surface of his existence, seemed a thing apart from himself, while the real life went on beneath, a life of hopeless longing and regret. Hopeless, for he knew that to that one woman of all the world of women he could never be more than the stage-player, the mountebank who was paid to amuse her, the hireling of the public, petted and favoured for a few seasons, and then forgotten. What was he among the men with whom Isabel Beaumont associated, the soldiers who had fought shoulder to shoulder with Wellington, the sailors who had been in the fiery hail at Trafalgar, the statesmen on whom the welfare of her country depended, the makers of history. She had been kind, she had given him her hand after that short interview in the Duchess's drawing-room; but every word she had said to him, every intonation of the low, soft voice had told him that she was talking to him across a gulf, the impassable abyss of difference between the salaried actor and the great lady.

Night after night, roaming in lonely and silent streets, or by the starlit river, after his triumph at the theatre, he had fought the battle of a man's life, the battle between mind and heart. Mind told him that Fate had given him all that he had ever longed for, success more dazzling than the wildest dream of his boyhood. Heart told him that success was a poor thing in a life without love. And for him there was no other love possible than this which he was trying to kill. It seemed to him that there was but one cure for that hopeless passion. It was to make himself a monster of selfishness—concentrate every faculty upon the actor's ambition to excel. He must be satisfied with no success—however dazzling. No applause from the public, no praise from the critics, must be enough. He must be always striving for the something more, the *au delà*. His motto in art must be Charles the Fifth's "*Plus ultra*." He must become a

monster of vanity, as well as a monster of self-love. So only could he teach himself to forget.

While there were unknown occupants night after night in Lady Beaumont's box, Godwin's other admirer was generally in her box on the lower tier, with her elderly husband in attendance upon her; sometimes awake and attentive, applauding with large hands in larger white gloves; sometimes effacing himself in the shadowy background, where he could slumber at his ease.

Visitors waited upon the lady between the acts, and sometimes remained with her, conversing in whispers, while Godwin was on the stage, to his intense disgust—for the pretence of interest in his acting in the midst of this frivolous chatter was an insult. No doubt she was the kind of woman who would affect admiration for anything that happened to be the fashion.

Among his letters one morning late in October he found one in a woman's hand, the fashionable Italian hand, signed Julia Longford.

"You will wonder, Mr. Godwin, at receiving a letter from a stranger, but you can hardly fail to have seen that in the stage box on the O.P. side, you have had a devoted admirer—one to whom your acting has been a source of delight. But I am something more than this—and much as I delight in your genius, it is in the man rather than in the actor that I am interested. I want much to see you, to tell you about myself, perhaps to tell you something about yourself, something that may startle, but I hope will not displease you—unless you and I are more unlike in mind and heart than we ought to be.

"Will you come and see me? The sooner the better—for I want you to be something nearer to me than the actor on the stage—I want you to be at least my friend. I am old enough to be your mother—so you cannot misconstrue my offer of friendship. Come soon, dear Godwin. I shall stay at home from eleven till two every day till I receive your visit. My husband's business as a colonial merchant takes him to Mincing Lane daily, so we shall be able to converse without fear of interruption.

"Your faithful friend,"

"EMILY LONGFORD.

"MINERVA HOUSE,

"CLAPHAM COMMON."

Godwin read the letter with a troubled brow. He hated this intrusion of a stranger into his private life. He hated a letter which seemed full of hidden meanings—an offer of friendship, urged as if by a right—a letter that might have some bearing on the hidden part of his life, that unknown beginning of his existence which he had thought of lately with pain.

Was it not well for him that Isabel Beaumont had been interested only in the unreal figure on the stage, and had asked no question about the origin of the man? What if she had shown a more intimate feeling, and had wanted to know from what manner of people he had sprung? How horrible to have to tell her that his birth was shrouded in an obscurity that he feared to penetrate, lest the cloud should conceal a story of shame.

His first impulse had been to show Mrs. Longford's letter to Sarah Merritt. If it had any bearing upon his past history Sarah would be able to enlighten him as to its meaning; but on second thoughts he resolved to see the writer first of all. Face to face with this woman who demanded his friendship, it would be easy for him to pluck out the heart of her mystery. He sent for his horse, and set out for Clapham Common, a place familiar to him in those rural rides which had been a habit with him of late.

At the advice of a famous physician who was one of his most ardent admirers, he had taken to riding for two or three hours on all his leisure days, as a relief from the close atmosphere of the theatre. A gallop in Richmond Park and over Wimbledon Common was the best cure for blue devils, and he loved long, solitary rides in the rural roads and lanes that surrounded Charles Lamb's London. Riding, and fencing, and the long midnight rambles were enough to keep nerves and frame in working order.

Minerva House was one of the handsomest houses on Clapham Common at a period when all the houses facing that green expanse suggested wealth and long-established respectability. A couple of grooms in stable clothes emerged from the adjacent yard at the sound of a horse's hoofs on the carriage drive, and took the hack into custody when Godwin dismounted in front of the classic doorway, crowned with a marble bust of Minerva.

The door was flung open as he approached, and a butler of the period, ponderous and elderly, and a pair of portly footmen in crimson plush breeches, and fawn-coloured coats, were ready in the hall, and gazed at the famous actor with eyes of wonder. The footmen had seen him night after night, from the shilling



gallery, each in turn, when in attendance upon their mistress at the theatre.

"Yes, Mrs. Longford was at home. Mr. Godwin?" interrogatively. "My mistress expects you, sir," and the butler led the way through a hall of statues and a corridor of modern pictures, to a spacious room that wanted no object proper to a fashionable woman's drawing-room. All that money could buy for pomp and pleasure had been supplied by the complacent husband who spent his days in Mincing Lane.

Mrs. Longford started up from her chair near the fire and came eagerly forward, with outstretched hands—both hands—but Godwin was satisfied with one, which he took with a somewhat distant courtesy.

"How formal you are, Mr. Godwin," said the lady, and then she went hastily to the door, opened it quickly, and looked outside, and then shut it carefully.

"Not listening!" she said. "That's a wonder. Servants are such spies, men-servants especially, for they have nothing to do but eat and drink, and pry into their master and mistress's affairs. Oh, do come and sit by the fire, and do look at me as if you were human."

He could only smile, and seat himself quietly in the chair which she indicated. Her manner was to the last degree unpleasant to him; but he had to remember that she was a woman, and that he was there at her urgent request—not for his pleasure, but for hers.

"Frankly, Mrs. Longford, your letter puzzled me," he said quietly, while she sat looking at him.

"Of course it did. You must have thought it a curious letter; not quite proper. To you I am only one in a crowd—the crowd of your admirers; only the wife of a City merchant, rich enough to have her own box at your theatre. That is all you know about me."

"Precisely so, madam."

"And you have no wish to know more—no natural curiosity about the woman who hangs upon your words night after night, who seeks no higher pleasure than to see you act? Are you so hard and so cold as to feel no interest in her?"

"An actor cannot trust himself to consider individuals among his audience, madam. He has to act for the multitude. It is the public voice that judges him."

"But does an actor cease to be a man? Has he no heart, no affection?"

"He keeps those for the sanctuary of his private life."

"And am I never to come into that sanctuary? I said I would tell you something about myself—and I had better give you my history in as few words as I can—since I see you are not interested!"

"I am ready to be interested."

"Well, that's something. Did you ever hear of a comedy actress who was very successful at Drury Lane some five-and-twenty years ago—Miss Emily Clairmont by name?"

"Yes, I have heard of that lady."

"I was Emily Clairmont. I left the stage at a time when I was on the high road to a grand position, threw up all my chances, because I was fool enough to listen to a man of high rank who was passionately in love with me, and who pursued me with an ardour that no woman could resist. He was young, handsome, eloquent, one of the most distinguished men of his day—though then only at the beginning of his public career. There were obstacles on his side to our marriage; but I had his promise that when his father's death set him free I was to be his wife. I built upon that promise, and felt secure in my power over a man who seemed to live only for me."

"Why not spare yourself the pain of recalling an unfortunate history, madam? No good can come of these revelations. Let the past be past, in memory as it is in fact."

"No, Godwin, I have a reason for telling you the real facts of a story that you may have heard distorted, falsified, by those who love to slander a helpless woman."

"I have heard nothing," Godwin said quickly, "and I wish to hear nothing. I see you in a handsome house, the wife of an honest man. Let that suffice between two people who were strangers until this morning; and allow me to bid you good day and go back to London, where I have engagements this afternoon." He rose from his chair with these words, and walked towards the door.

Mrs. Longford followed him, and he turned and faced her, with a serious countenance.

"How hard you are," she said. "A man with a heart would have understood—would have guessed. Oh, you piece of adamant! A man with a heart would have been touched by my devoted admiration: even though I was only a stranger."

"I do not take my audience so seriously, madam."

"And you never wondered, you never wanted to know me? Oh, you cold, dull creature! What was it, do you think, that brought my tears when I saw you die as Hamlet?"

"Without conceit I would say it was a successful realisation of the character."

"No, sir, it was not the actor that melted me. It was the man—it was the boy—it was the child. It was my son."

She had come nearer to him with each ascending clause in her speech, and with the last words she put her hands upon his shoulders and tried to draw him to her breast; but he stepped back, and faced her with a look that killed hope.

"You are dreaming, madam," he said.

"What! Would you hold back? Would you deny me? When I am bursting with pride in your genius, when I want the whole world to know you for my son."

"Have you ever heard of d'Alembert, the famous French philosopher, whose mother left him to the cold comfort of the stones of Paris? The time came when he was famous, and she was proud of him, and would have owned him. But he was proud—too proud to be owned by her. He had a mother whom he loved, the workman's wife who had rescued and reared him. When next you do me the honour to see me act, madam, remember d'Alembert."

"Oh, you cruel creature—you have no more heart now than you had when you were a gipsy child, and scrambled out of my arms, and refused to kiss me. That was a good many years ago, and I was young and volatile, and my friends and I made a joke of the bare-legged boy with the starlike eyes. But I have grown serious now, and I am yearning for your love."

"Too late, madam. Let me always be a joke for you—an accident in your life, to be remembered with a careless laugh."

He bowed, and left her. She rushed to the window, and stood there till she saw him ride away in the afternoon sunlight, without one glance at the house he was leaving.

She shrugged her shoulders angrily, and flung herself into her favourite arm-chair.

"Heartless monster," she muttered, and then, musing by the fire, she told herself that it was perhaps a lucky escape. Indulgent as her husband was, and though he had known something of her past life when he married her, admiring her all the more, perhaps, because she had a kind of celebrity, as the mistress of a famous nobleman—he might not have taken kindly to a distinguished stepson flung upon him at short notice.

He had neither son nor daughter—and the childless house had been the disappointment of his life.

## CHAPTER XII

THERE were no visitors in Bedford Square that night, and Godwin and Mrs. Merritt enjoyed a *tête-à-tête* supper in the actor's den, a room at the back of the house where he wrote his letters, and where he was gradually accumulating a library. Many of the books on his shelves were gifts from the authors ; " The Bride of Abydos," with Byron's autograph—" The Loves of the Angels," from Tom Moore—Sir Walter Scott's last novel—and books from writers less famous.

There was nothing Sarah loved better than a supper with Godwin in this quiet room, and on such occasions they often sat talking together for a long time after the meal was finished, Sarah loving to expatiate upon the change in her darling's fortunes since the old strolling-player days, when a few scraps of cold meat, or a slab of Dutch cheese and a lettuce, were all she could manage to set before the lad who had been calling upon his physical strength as well as his mental power in three or four hours of impassioned acting.

To-night there was no time for those backward glimpses at the barren years : for when the table was cleared, and the maid-servant had retired for the night, Godwin had something more serious to talk about.

" Mother, do you know anything about a Mrs. Longford who has a rich husband and a house on Clapham Common ? " he asked suddenly.

" Yes, my dear, I know all about her. What makes you ask ? "

" She has written to me, and I have been to her house to-day at her request."

" Oh, she asked you to see her ? I wonder at her impudence. What did she want ? "

" She wanted to claim me for her son."

" What did you say to her ? "

The question was asked quietly ; but the colour had faded out of Sarah Merritt's honest face, and the good, hard-working hands, folded upon her silk apron, were trembling a little as she sat with her eyes fixed upon Godwin, waiting for his reply.

"What did I say? I made her understand that the dear woman who cherished me when I was a helpless infant, and cared for me all the days of my life, was the mother I love and honour. There is no room in my heart for anyone else called by the name of mother."

"My darling. My dearest and best! And can you forgive me for having deceived you? For having cheated you out of your love?"

"No, no, there was no cheat. You gave me love for love. Oh, mother, do you think I can ever forget my boyhood, the sacrifices you made for me—the help you gave me in my struggle for success? Without you I could have done nothing. There never lived a son who owed more to his mother than I owe to you."

Sarah Merritt was speechless. She hid her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed as if her heart was breaking, but then, recovering herself with an effort, made haste to say, "I am crying for joy, Monkey, only for joy. You have taken a load from my heart. I knew that woman would want to get hold of you now that you are prosperous and famous. I thought she might have won you over with her false, insinuating tongue—just as she won a rich husband when she was left in the lurch by her lover."

"I have never questioned you about my history, mother," Godwin said quietly, and at every repetition of that word "mother," Sarah gave a little agitated sob, and put her handkerchief over tearful eyes. "I knew from the time my education began with Patrick O'Brien—when I began to think the thoughts of a man—that there was a secret about my birth—a sorrowful story—or perhaps a shameful one—but I knew that shame could never have touched you. Well, now I have seen the woman who says she is my mother, and a man who gave me reason to believe he is my father, and I have disowned them both; so there's the end of that story. They who abandoned the child can have no claim to the man. I belong to you, mother, only to you, and to the art for which I live."

"Ah, my dearest, you have made me a happy woman: but there will come a day when I shall have to give up my dearest to a still happier woman—to the wife you are bound to love better than me. She will be a lucky woman, dear, for it is only a loving son that makes a loving husband."

"No, mother, I shall never marry."

"Nonsense."

"I am married to the stage. What should an actor do with a wife? A man who has to think himself into the skin of Hamlet



or Lear must have no distracting influences—none of the lover's fevers and apprehensions—hot fits and cold fits."

"No, dear, but the husband's calm and steady love need not be a hindrance. A good wife would respect her husband's profession—his success would be as precious to her as to him."

"I shall never marry," Godwin repeated with gloomy resolution. "The only woman I would choose for a wife is out of my reach—as the stars are. Don't let us talk of this again, mother. Every word upon that subject is like the thrust of a knife—and now tell me about your dealings with Mrs. Longford."

"I was her servant, my dear. She and I were born and bred in the same village, not far from Southampton Water. She was a small farmer's daughter, and my parents had the village shop. We were at school together, and playmates; but she was two years older than I, and ten years cleverer, and she was the prettiest girl in the parish, and as vain as a peacock. Her mother died before Emily was in her teens, and the father married again. I don't know if the stepmother was unkind, but Emily said she was, and that her father always took sides with his wife—and she made that an excuse for running away from home. She disappeared one day, and nobody knew what had become of her. Her father, James Barnet, was a hard man, and took less trouble to find a missing daughter than he would have done to look for a strayed heifer. People told all sorts of stories about her—one being that she had been seen on the stage at Salisbury: but nothing was known till after Mr. Barnet's death, when she came back to the farm to claim her share of his property. She came to see me, and talked of the time when we had been playfellows, and made believe to be fond of me. She was very handsome, and fine and fashionable, and made a fool of me. Father was dead. He had done well in business, and my mother owned the house and shop, and was comfortably off, and father had left me two hundred pounds. I was just twenty-one, and I felt pleased to be my own mistress—mother and I not having got on over-well together—and when Emily offered to take me to London as her maid, to wait on her at home and at the theatre, I said yes. I had no call to go into service, with two hundred pounds in the bank and a good home, but the thought of London and the theatre dazzled me; so off I went, leaving my poor old mother incensed against me for deserting her. I was sorry for it afterwards, Monkey, for I never saw her again. She died in the hard winter after I left home; she died without forgiving me, and left all she possessed

to the Wesleyan minister she had sat under for nine-and-twenty years. I didn't want her money, but I wanted a kind word before she died. This is a long, rambling story, my dear, but you don't mind, do you ? ”

“ No, no. I love to hear you talk. It brings back our old days in the van, when you used to tell me about the theatre.”

“ You wondered that I should know so much. Well, I came to London with Emily Clairmont, who was a fine lady at this time—and had to be waited on hand and foot. She had handsome lodgings in Adelphi Terrace, and heaps of expensive clothes. She had got two or three hundred pounds out of her father's estate—after a hard fight with his widow, who wanted everything—and she spent her money as if it was water, but all upon herself. I don't know what her salary was ; but as she never played leading business I don't suppose it was a big one. She was put forward in comedies and farces, for her beauty. Well, I soon discovered that there was someone in the background ; but as he was a gentleman in a very high position he never appeared with her in public, and only came to her lodgings in a secret kind of way. Perhaps it was this that made her angry—for I know there were frequent quarrels—and after they had quarrelled he would walk out of the house and not come back again for a week or more ; but he always came back after a bit, and she thought herself very sure of her power over him, till there came a night when he made an unexpected visit, and found she was not alone. Jack Howard, the comedian, ‘ Handsome Jack ’ as they called him, saw her home after the play, and she asked him to supper. His lordship came from the House of Commons at one o'clock in the morning and found them at table together. I don't believe that there was any harm in it, dear, nothing more than a flirtation with a young man who was notorious for making love to every good-looking woman in the company. There was no angry talk, no row—but Emily Barnet's lover walked out of the house, and this time he never came back again.”

“ The man was Lord Clontarf,” said Godwin.

“ Yes. How did you know that ? ”

“ Never mind, mother—I know.”

“ It was a wretched business,” continued Sarah. “ He sent her money—three or four hundred pounds, I believe. He had always been generous to her. But he never came back, and he did not answer her letters. Emily was desperate. She threw up her engagement at the theatre on pretence of sudden illness. She couldn't have appeared there much longer, clever as she was.

After that I had a wretched time with her. She was very careful of her money now that she had no fine gentleman's purse to draw upon, and now there was no salary coming in. She decided to leave Adelphi Terrace, and go into shabby rooms in a street near St. Bride's, where nobody would know anything about her. It was there you were born, Godwin, in secrecy and gloom. She hated your coming—hated you before you were born—and she hated you when you came. You were not a pretty baby, my dear. Your great dark eyes in a tiny pale face—you weren't red like most babies—and your dark hair, gave you rather an impish look. 'Take him away, Sally,' she cried, 'I'm afraid of him,' and she was quite hysterical when the nurse laid the poor little creature in her arms; and then when she and I were alone she told me that I must go next day to some quiet village near London, Enfield, or Cheshunt, or Edmonton, or Chigwell, in Epping Forest, and I must find some honest, respectable woman, a working-man's wife, or a widow with a comfortable cottage, and I must make a bargain with her. She was to take the baby, and bring him up as her own child, and make an honest working-man of him, no matter how humble the trade, a farm-servant for choice. And she was to be paid a lump sum, fifty pounds, or a hundred, if she would not do it for less. I was to make a hard-and-fast bargain with her, and she was never to know anything about the boy's parents. She was just to take him from my arms, as if he was her own flesh and blood."

"That was my mother's plan?"

"Yes, that was her plan. She had been brooding over it before you came, and she had sounded me about it. I took the poor little wretch away from her, after she had told me her plan, and the creature put its tiny fingers round my finger, as if it wanted to cling to something human. 'Do you think you can find such a woman?' she said. 'Oh, yes,' said I, 'there are women in the world who would do a good deal for fifty pounds—drown your baby, even, if you wanted to be sure you wouldn't see him again.' That made her angry, and she stormed and cried, and called me a cruel wretch, 'Don't fret,' says I. 'The woman shall be found—an honest woman—and your brat shall come to no harm,' and then I drew the curtain round her bed, and while she was sound asleep I scraped up the poor little stock of baby clothes she had bought for you, and packed them in a carpet bag, and I packed my own box, while the nurse took care of you, and then I went out and found a lodging in the next street, and I carried you and our luggage there in a hackney coach, at ten

o'clock that night, while the nurse was at her supper in the kitchen; and that was the beginning of our life in the van, Monkey, for I soon found out that you wouldn't make old bones if I kept you in a London street, besides which I had to earn my living somehow, for my two hundred pounds wouldn't last for ever."

"And did Emily Clairmont make no attempt to find you?"

"Not she. I had done what she wanted; and the way I did it was of no consequence. All she wanted was to be Emily Clairmont again, with a handsome face and figure, and to get back to the stage. She thought no more of you than if you had been a disease from which she had recovered."

"And did she never know that you had adopted me?"

"Not till you were nearly five years old, and then it was borne in upon me one night when I was saying my prayers in Lyndhurst Church that it was a sin to leave a mother in ignorance of her child's fate. Your mother had been heartless when she told me that I was to find a home for you anywhere, with anyone; but I thought she might have been hardly in her right mind at that time—and how could I tell whether she might have repented, and suffered later, wondering what had become of you. So, even at the risk of losing you, I wrote to her, and told her all about you, and where we were to be found. I grizzled for a week after I had posted the letter, thinking she would come to claim you—but I needn't have fretted. She wrote a long letter, saying I had used her very badly, but that perhaps you were better off with me than with her, and she sent me a fifty-pound note, which I sent her back next day. As if I wanted her dirty money!"

"Was she the woman who came galloping through the water in Queen's Bower, with three or four men splashing after her?"

"Yes, that was your mother. You didn't take kindly to her, dear."

"I suppose there are other women like that," said Godwin, after some minutes of thoughtful silence. "Poor creatures! Why should they love the child of shame?"

"And now you know the truth, you will still call me by the dear old name?" Sarah said with streaming eyes.

"Always, always. What can a son ask from his mother that you have not given me?"

"Well, dear, we have been happy together in cloud and sunshine. We have tramped along hard roads, and lived on hard fare."

"And I have tasted failure and drunk the cup of disappoint-



ment," said Godwin, taking up the strain; "yet now, when I look back, those days do not seem all unhappy. It was only when I had poor parts to play, and the audience sniggered at me, that I felt the sting. To play Hamlet in a barn, with the applause of country bumpkins. *That was bliss!*"

"But there was no chicken and bottle of claret waiting for you when you came home. Only dry bread and cheese, and half a pint of thin ale."

"Ah, how I used to enjoy it, when I had had my fill of applause."

"But now you are a great man, and can have anything in the world that you want: and you have given me luxuries such as I never dreamt of. A duchess couldn't have a richer satin than my last gown."

"Wear it every day, mother. Don't hoard it. Come, dear, dry your tears, and let us be business-like, and look Fate in the face. God has been good to me and given me the things I longed for; but I must not forget the brand upon my birth. I must never blind myself to the fact that I am nobody—less than nobody—and when men and women of rank and position give me their friendship and make me their companion, I must never forget why they do it, never build my house of life upon the sand, and expect it to stand firm when the tempest rages."

Sarah listened and sighed, but she could not follow his thought.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "how did Mrs. Longford come to know that Godwin the actor was her repudiated brat?"

"That was my fault," said Sarah meekly. "It was in your first season—only a month after your success. Do you remember sending me to Hilditch's shop on Ludgate Hill to buy a silk gown? Somebody had told you it was the best place in London for silks and satins, and so it is. And while I was sitting by the counter, trying to make up my mind between a dark puce and a myrtle green, a grand carriage stops at the door, and in walks Emily Clairmont, handsomer and finer than ever. She came straight to the counter where I sat, stared hard at me for half a minute, and then, 'Bless my soul,' says she, 'we do look prosperous!' I had on my new velvet bonnet and cloth pelisse, the first you bought for me. When she had done staring she sat down beside me, and began to ask a lot of questions. Had you lived to grow up? Had I sent you to school, and brought you up to earn an honest living? Or were you a rogue and a vagabond, living among gipsies? And then I couldn't keep my foolish tongue from wagging, and I told her what a genius you



were, and how handsome, and how all the town was running after you. 'Oh,' she said, short and sharp, 'then he won't want me.' 'I don't think he will,' I said, a bit sharper, and I got up to go. 'Well, if I wanted a son now, I could afford the luxury,' she said, 'for my husband is one of the richest men in London.' I told her that money wouldn't buy the son she cast off in his babyhood. 'The son you stole,' she said. I told her there was no stealing about it, for I only took what wasn't wanted, and I left the shop without another word, and saw her fine carriage at the door as I walked away. So it was my fault, dear."

"Well, it is best to get to the root of things," he answered with a sigh; "but I wish with all my heart you had been my mother. I should like to have been the son of a good woman."

"No matter what your mother was, Godwin, you are good, generous, honourable, with a heart of gold. After all, your father is a great man, and you take after him."

"Never speak of him. I want to forget. I stand alone in the world, with no tender memories of youth and childhood, except of happy days with you. I must be alone as long as I live."

There was unspeakable melancholy in the voice that spoke, and in the pale, grave face and thoughtful eyes. Sarah flung her arms round him in a burst of tender feeling.

"You'll tell another story some day, my dear, when you have won the heart of a good woman."

He did not answer, and the end of Sarah Merritt's story was sadness and silence.

## CHAPTER XIII

PATRICK O'BRIEN was installed in his City vicarage, and a frequent visitor at the house in Bedford Square. He was not one of those wicked shepherds who "creep, intrude, and climb into the fold, and little reckoning make about the sheep"; and he spent a good many hours in his parish work, for a dreadful street of tenement houses, and more than one cut-throat alley, lay hidden behind the snug dwellings of the well-to-do citizens who came to his Sunday morning service, and sent their servants and children on Sunday afternoons. There was plenty of need for the corporal works of mercy, and for spiritual counsel, among the poor of his flock—so Patrick did not eat the bread of idleness.

Still there was always time for a supper and a ramble with his forty-shilling pupil, when Godwin summoned him with one of his friendly notes. "Have you quite forgotten me? Or are you afraid of the night air? It is nearly a fortnight since we have seen you, and my mother fancies she must have given you a bad supper the last time you were with us."

"A bad supper! Sure, potatoes and buttermilk and your company would be good enough," O'Brien said, when he burst into Godwin's den on the stroke of midnight, and found Sarah putting the last touches to the supper-table, while she waited for Godwin's return. "But indeed, Mrs. Merritt, your table is only too generous, and I play too good a knife and fork when I sup with you."

"But you get enough exercise afterwards to prevent your supper doing you any harm," Sarah said gaily. "It's a mystery to me what Godwin and you can find to talk about, wandering in the deserted streets. Anyhow, it's better for him than roaming alone, thinking melancholy thoughts."

"Are the spalpeen's thoughts melancholy, ma'am? Bedad, he has no occasion; for there never was a lad that had better luck or more friends. To be under five-and-twenty, the top of the fashion, run after by all London, and making his fortune as fast as he can rake the money in! Can he be melancholy?"

"Yes, there's a cloud has come over his life, Mr. O'Brien, a cloud that darkens my dear boy's sunshine. He was so happy in his first season. Everything that happened, everything that he did, was a delight to him. The theatre was the joy of his heart. His friends, the parties he gave, and the parties he went to, everything made him happy. And now I can scarcely persuade him to accept an invitation to dinner in one of those grand houses where they make so much of him, and where he used to meet famous people of all kinds. And he loved meeting them. And now he doesn't care about anything. All the joy seems to have gone—like a fire that has burnt out."

"There's only one explanation for that, Mrs. Merritt. Our boy is in love."

"Then it must be an unhappy love, or he wouldn't keep it a secret from me."

Godwin came in while they were talking of him—a little tired after the night's work, and with none of that animation with which, elated and triumphant, he had been wont to tell Sarah how the play had gone, and how loud and how long the applause had been after all the great situations. Of late he had not seemed to care very much whether there had been enthusiasm or apathy in the front of the house.

To-night he had nothing to say about the audience, till Sarah questioned him. Oh, the play went very well. Much as usual. Yes, there were plenty of fine people in the boxes—though so many are away at their country seats. There are always fine people in London. The town draws them like a loadstone. He was pleased to see O'Brien.

"You mustn't desert me," he said. "I want your company of a night to keep off the blue devils."

He was brighter at supper, pushed the wine upon O'Brien, and talked of public affairs with animation and understanding. There were the usual political entanglements, and England seemed at a crisis. Then there was Byron's new poem—a Turkish story—more interesting than the fate of empires. When supper was finished and the second bottle of Château Margaux was nearly empty, actor and parson bade Sarah good night, pulled on their overcoats, and went out into the square, and thence by Gower Street to the open country between Tottenham Court Road and Hampstead—a broad, high road with a handsome villa here and there on the right, and with Primrose Hill and a stretch of meadowland on the left. They walked for some

distance in absolute silence—walked fast, with long, swinging steps, enjoying the crisp air, under a starlit sky.

Godwin halted suddenly, and looked up at the stars which were flaming with unusual splendour in the frosty atmosphere, planets and constellations, and arrows of silvery light that flashed across the purple vault like living creatures.

"How wonderful they are," Godwin said, in a low voice, talking to himself rather than to his friend. "How wonderful! How little the wisest of us know about them, and what worms they make us feel."

"Better not to measure ourselves against the infinite. Why should we think about things that can only engender despair? I take those celestial lights as something that makes for my comfort and convenience, and elevates my mind by a spectacle of ineffable beauty. But were I to compare myself to Jupiter yonder, moving through space, deathless and painless—I might begin to be discontented with my lot, because I am human—subject to pain and doomed to die."

"Yes, Patrick, you are right. We must accept our lives with their limitations."

They walked on, through the little townlet of Hampstead, where all was silence, to the airy stretch of heath and the dark fir trees at the top of the hill.

"Your good mother seems a trifle anxious about you, Godwin," O'Brien said, after an interval of silence. "These affectionate creatures are watchful where they love. She tells me you have lost your good spirits, which is a loss should befall no man of five-and-twenty."

"Oh, we cannot all be as lively as Charles Surface, or Dick Sheridan, who is a boy at fifty," Godwin said, laughing.

"But you of all young men should be happy and in high spirits."

"Should I? Yes, I have realised my wish—my dream, of those old days in the Forest—and yet I confess I am not happy. 'Naught's had, all's spent, when our desire is got without content.'"

"And why are you not content?"

"Because I have begun to ask questions. My fate seemed perfect till that began. Do you know, Pat, on my first night of success—when I left the theatre with the thunder of applause in my ears—I rushed through the streets like a lunatic; I sprang up the lodging-house stairs, I fell into my mother's arms betwixt laughter and tears; I danced round the table with that dear

creature, like a red Indian savage. I was mad with joy—and now——”

“Now you take life more soberly, and you praise God for giving you your heart’s desire.”

“Now I begin to ask myself whether it is worth any man’s while to be an actor, whether the stage is a profession that any man can be proud of. Is it a career worthy of a man? Is it a calling that a woman can honour? A life of dreams, a life of shams—one’s only art to create an illusion—a sham hero, who strips off all that is heroic, with his stage clothes.”

“Godwin, if you begin to look down upon your trade your career is done. Yes, the actor’s life is a life of dreams—a passing from illusion to illusion. God help him when the hard light of reality breaks in upon his dream-world. God help him if he lose the power to dream. It is a divine gift, Godwin.”

“The hard light has come into my dream. Oh, God, when I think of the men with whom I rub shoulders—the soldiers and sailors—who have fought and bled for England; the lawyers and statesmen, the Churchmen and poets; when I think of what *they* have done for their country, and measure myself against them, I am ashamed of my futile existence, my strenuous toil about nothing, an actor, run after and applauded to-day, forgotten to-morrow, a creature of no use to his country or to mankind.”

“Of no use? Is that the way you look at it? Pray, is Shakespeare of any use to England? Shouldn’t we be just as well off if he had never lived? Or is he a glorious possession that every English-speaking man upon this earth is proud of? Why, we would surrender the Indies sooner than our Shakespeare.”

“Oh, the poet is different. He is the creator.”

“Yes; and do you think the actor has no share in the work of creation—the actor who gives vivid human life, flesh and blood and heat and fire to the poet’s dream? Among all the thousands in the pit and gallery who know ‘Hamlet’ and ‘Othello’ from having listened to you and the Kembles, how many in the hundred do you suppose have read Shakespeare? The book can do nothing for them. They want the voice, the presence of the actor. Their unliterary minds must be stimulated by living pictures. The printed page is not enough.”

“Ah, Patrick, you were always good to me.”

“Make your mind easy, my dear fellow. A fine actor is second only to a great poet in his value to the world. God knows your average man is in need of shams and shadows that



will distract his thoughts from the ledger and the money market ; and there is no more elevating influence in the dull, dead life of buying and selling and counting gain and loss than a night with ' Hamlet ' or ' Lear. ' "

" You are always good. You opened a new world to me when I was a boy. You lift a load off my heart now. I have brooded too long over my life. I have been an egotist of the first water."

" You are not tired of the stage ? "

" That would mean tired of life. I only live when I am acting."

" But how about your success in society ? Is not that something to be proud of ? No actor since Garrick has been so run after, so accepted as one of the élite—the élite of mind, if not of birth."

" People have been kind—and curious. Yes, I have enjoyed society."

" You have enjoyed ? Why the past tense ? "

" Frankly, I am tired of it all—tired of everything except acting. I was flattered, amused, interested, at first, when great people took me up—as the phrase goes—but they might drop me to-morrow, and I should feel none the worse."

" That's a pity."

" The glamour has gone out of it, the lights begin to burn low."

" There is only one solution for this problem," said the parson. " You have been too lucky. A touch of failure will be your best medicine. Half the joy of success is in fighting for it. You have won your battle too easily."

" Ah, if you knew the path of difficulty, the toil and penury. But I look back sometimes and think those were my best days. My bosom's lord sat lightly on his throne. The night I played Othello for the first time to a handful of prentice lads and clodhoppers at Reading I was as happy as a king."

" Take a plain man's advice, my friend. Don't provoke Fate by discontent. There's always someone waiting round the corner to trip us up, if we don't walk steadily. Come to church next Sunday, and let me administer the medicine of a moral discourse. My text shall be Solomon, the warning and example for the discontented mind."

" You are right, Pat. I ought to be ashamed of myself. I have everything, and yet I seem to have nothing."

O'Brien said to himself that an unhappy love affair could be the only reason for his young friend's melancholy, but he would

not invite Godwin's confidence. Better, perhaps, if the case were hopeless, that the young man should not talk himself into a fever about a passion that might be strangled by silence. The fact that Godwin did not open his heart to so near a friend seemed to indicate a stern resolve. The disconsolate lover is generally loquacious, and will rave about his cruel mistress from midnight to break of day.

Godwin's talk was brighter on the way back to London—more like the old boyish talk of far-off things, the philosophy of poets. Coleridge and Wordsworth were in the ascendant just then, and both were philosophers.

"It is our egotism that kills great thoughts," Godwin said. "That is the vice against which one has to fight hardest, to live in this big world and think only of oneself, for ever looking inward, and not outward—a self-centred worm; to be able to realise nothing but one's own feelings, one's own longings—what a petty kind of life it is!"

"Oh, we are all egotists."

"Yes—the dreamers, the stage-players, the poets even, but not the men of action, not the men who fight for their country; not the discoverers who penetrate strange countries, and face man-eating savages and famished lions; not great soldiers and sailors; not Nelson or Wellington, Pitt or Canning. There is no room for egotism in those men's lives; no time for sick fancies and futile aspirations." And then, with a gay laugh, and a change of tone, he said: "I'll come to your church next Sunday morning, Patrick; and let your sermon be upon the monstrous vice of egotism, the vice that narrows a man's heart and mind to the one spot upon which all his thoughts are centred—himself—and his own desires."

## CHAPTER XIV

BEFORE the rehearsals for "Mother Goose" and the harlequinade began Godwin had gone to Scotland, where he was received with a warmth for which the Scottish audience is not remarkable. His success was instantaneous and extraordinary. Edinburgh, Glasgow, and the lesser towns showed the same delight in his genius; and hospitality and attention from distinguished people met him at every stage in his tour. Those four or five weeks in Scotland were too full of stage triumphs and social pleasures to leave much time for melancholy thoughts, and he was happier—because more occupied and interested by other people—than he had been for a long time. To sit at table for the first time with Sir Walter Scott; to sit late into the night, among a few choice spirits, listening to that unsurpassable raconteur, charmed by that lovely smile, and deeply moved by praise from that king of men, was an event in a life. To meet Jeffrey and de Quincey was a pleasure not to be held lightly. Godwin was not so much an egotist as to be conscious of self in such society. Among these men he was able to forget all sick fancies; and walking home with Scott to the house in Castle Street, through the most beautiful city in Europe, under the wintry stars, he felt as if he had been translated into a new and delightful world, and that he had done with unhappiness and brooding thoughts.

The Duchess of Pentland was at her seat near Galashiels, and insisted that he should visit her on his return journey.

"It is hardly twenty miles out of your way," she wrote. "You will be in Scott's country, and if he chances to be at Abbotsford, I will carry you there to one of his hospitable dinners—informal and friendly—at which the Shirrah appears at his best."

Such an invitation from a friend to whom he was under obligations for kindness and even affection, could not be slighted. Godwin finished his tour with a return visit to Edinburgh, and after a farewell performance of "Hamlet" posted to the Duchess's seat in the valley of the Gala—a sixteenth-century castle,

which looked as if it had been copied from one of the smaller châteaux on the banks of the Loire.

The house was very French in style inside as well as outside, for the present Duke's grandfather had spent the last years of his life in exile with his master, James the Second, and had beguiled the monotony of his foreign life by collecting treasures of tapestry and furniture in all the great French cities, which he duly sent over to the ancestral home in Scotland, where he hoped to end his days. He did not live to see his treasures in that place; but the inheritance was cherished by those who came after him. Time had greatly increased the value of the old Duke's acquisitions, and the Pentland collection was now famous.

Godwin was enchanted with a house that was like a chapter in one of Walter Scott's novels. He loved the Scottish garden even in its severe winter aspect, a terraced garden on a gentle slope, a garden of straight walks and clipped hedges of a century's growth, and strange heraldic beasts cut in box and yew, a place where tame peacocks spread their plumage in the sun, and stalked and screamed as if they were masters of the demesne.

"They ruin my flower-beds, but the Duke likes to hear them," her grace told Godwin. "Their screams and his piper's pibroch are his favourite music."

It was a happy, restful visit, and for that quiet interval Godwin put the playhouse out of his thoughts, and gave himself up to the tranquil enjoyment of the hour and to pleasing his friends. The dinner at Abbotsford was a memory to carry to one's grave: one of those rare occasions of perfect happiness, that are a joy merely to remember. He rode over to the Sheriff's house next morning by special invitation, and had the privilege of an hour's ramble in the woods and policies with the most delightful talker in the three kingdoms. On another day the Duchess took him to Melrose and Dryburgh, and in the evenings he read Shakespeare to the Duke, whose fine mind was apprehensive as ever, though he was physically infirm. The Duke was charmed with Godwin, and Godwin with the Duke, and the Duchess loved her protégé all the more on discovering how sympathetic and tactful the actor of twenty-five could be with the invalid of seventy.

"Come to the terrace and say good-bye to the peacocks, Godwin," the Duchess said to him on the morning of his departure. "You have at least half an hour before your post-chaise is due, and we must have a quiet talk before you go.

But you must keep ten minutes for the Duke, who has taken a prodigious fancy to you."

"His grace is very kind."

"No; it is you who are kind. You have amused and interested my dear old man, who has always been a student of Shakespeare, and who has seen all the great actors of his day. He told me in confidence that you surpass the best of them. 'Garrick may have been his equal, or Betterton,' he said, 'but the moderns cannot touch him.' And then—he admires you for your freedom from the popular actor's egotism."

"Ah, Duchess, if he knew me as I am—a supreme egotist."

"Not you."

"If it is egotism to be always thinking of oneself—one's own vain desires."

"Does that mean that you are not yet cured of your passion for a woman who values the quarterings in the family arms far above genius and merit? Are you still in love with Isabel Beaumont?"

"I cannot cure myself of thinking about her. She occupies all the waste spaces in my mind—the hours when I am not on the stage. She walks with me when I am tramping the streets in the night silence—trying to escape from thoughts of her. But my Scottish tour, and this delightful visit, have been a respite, and I believe I am curing myself of that madness, and shall soon be sane."

"I am glad to hear that, my dear young friend, for you can better bear to hear what I have to tell you."

"About Lady Beaumont?"

"She will soon have another name. She is to marry the Prince Doria, one of the noblest and richest of the Roman nobility—not so rich, however, that the Beaumont fortune will be an unnecessary factor in their lives. Those Italian princes have territory, their estates are like kingdoms, but they are often short of cash."

"He marries her for her money, and she marries him for his rank. 'The hearts of old gave hands, but our new heraldry is hands not hearts.'"

"Why should we exclude the heart in this case? She is an acknowledged beauty, and though the Prince is twenty years her senior, he is still in the prime of life—handsome and well preserved."

Godwin made no answer. The Duchess watched him anxiously as they walked side by side, meeting the frosty air. He was



very pale, and the lines of brow and lips and chin seemed to have become suddenly rigid. Those few moments of mental pain had made the young face old.

"There are plenty of lovely women in the world, Godwin, as soft-hearted as they are lovely. When you make up your mind to marry, you will have a wide choice. You are the sort of man women love."

"There are millions of women in the world; but there is only one for me. Dear Duchess, I am not going to rave and bluster. I have done with love and marriage."

"And you have only spoken with her once—that evening after my musical party."

"Only once—but it was enough."

He looked at his watch. "Only five minutes to take leave of the Duke."

He was posting to Berwick, where he was to take the fast coach for London, so minutes had to be counted.

The Duchess was unhappy about him.

"My old man and I are to be in St. James's Square in a fortnight," she said, standing by her husband's chair in the library, where the Duke spent most of his time—only moving from his arm-chair to a pony carriage, in which he drove about his park, and in the neighbouring rural lanes. He had been a distinguished man in his day, a leader of his clan, and a power in Scottish politics.

"I will let you know when we arrive, Godwin, and you must give us a spare evening now and then."

"You must come and read Shakespeare—the plays you have not acted in yet—'King John,' 'Henry the Eighth,' 'Coriolanus,' and I'll tell you about Kemble in his prime. I can give you all his points."

The quavering voice, the shrunken hand clasping his own with such warm friendship moved Godwin almost to tears. These were friends indeed. For these there was nothing contemptible in the actor's art. For these he was not a sham or a shadow.

## CHAPTER XV

THE winter season began a few days after Godwin's return to the house in Bedford Square, where Mrs. Merritt welcomed him with joyful tears. She knew all about his Scottish triumphs, for his valet and dresser, who travelled with him, had sent her newspapers in which columns of superior criticism were devoted to the young actor, and the new school of acting—the school in which impulse and passion, spontaneous and electrical effects, had succeeded to the statuesque attitudes and solemn elocution of the old school. The physical force, the intense vitality of the young actor went for much in the impression he made upon his audience—there were sinews of steel in the slender limbs, and there was quicksilver in the veins which stood out like whipcord on the pale brow in Hamlet's passionate moments—the burst of exultation at the King's discomfiture—the defiance of Laertes at Ophelia's grave.

All traces of "Mother Goose" had vanished, and clown and pantaloons had retired into private life, when Godwin re-entered the theatre. His season began brilliantly with "Richard the Third," and the house was crowded night after night, and the visitors in the green-room were people of distinction.

Godwin read the announcement of Lady Beaumont's approaching marriage with the Roman prince in more than one fashionable newspaper. This stern fact was like a severe surgical operation, and he thought it would serve to eradicate the plague-spot of a hopeless love. He thought that he was cured as if by the surgeon's knife; and in his quiet suppers and winter walks with O'Brien their talk was gay and animated. They talked of all things in heaven and earth; they philosophised, argued, were sometimes cynical, sometimes enthusiastic and sanguine; they talked of man's nature and man's destiny—of "the great perhaps."

They talked of everything except unhappy love, and O'Brien thought that his friend had forgotten any trouble of that kind. He did not know what dull, aching pain the surgeon's knife left in the heart of a man when its work was done.

The season was a month old, and at the suggestion of three or four gentlemen on the Committee, Godwin was preparing himself for his appearance in Massinger's "New Way to Pay Old Debts." It was no desire of his own to act in any play that was not Shakespeare's, and the Shakespearian drama seemed to him various enough to occupy any actor from the beginning to the end of his career, but the Committee wanted to see him in a new line, and he accepted the challenge.

It was while he was rehearsing Sir Giles Overreach that he was startled in the midst of his work by a letter from Fanny Fountain—of whom he had heard nothing since his mother's visit to her house, except that she was acting at Bath with considerable success in genteel comedy. The Bath papers had been warm in their praise of her beauty and sweet simplicity—an ideal Lydia Languish, an exquisite Letitia Hardy.

Her letter was brought to Godwin as he left the stage after the third act, two pages of Bath post scrawled over by a hand that had trembled as it wrote, blotted with ink, and smeared with tears. She was in deep distress. The bailiffs were in her house, and she dared not leave her room, lest they should carry her to prison. She implored Godwin to go to her. She had only one powerful friend in London, and she would die rather than appeal to him.

"After the cruel way in which I have been maligned, I cannot accept help from His Royal Highness," she wrote, "though I know he would send his equerry with *carte blanche* at the least hint of my difficulties. I will not write to *him*; and I have no one but you to whom I can turn in this overwhelming trouble—which has come upon me like a thunderclap. You can at least give me your advice. It is that I am asking for, Godwin, not money. This harpy milliner must be satisfied in some other way. I have paid her such sums in the past that she ought to have more forbearance. She must have made thousands by me in my first season. A blue silk spencer I wore at Ranelagh was the rage. All the women rushed to order one. And a mob cap the creature made for me was called the 'Fanny Fountain,' and was bought by the hundred. A guinea for half a yard of gauze and a pink satin bow. Lawrence painted me in that cap—I think you must know the picture."

Her frivolous pen ran away with her, even with the bailiff below-stairs. Then came more blots and blisters on the paper as she wrote, "Be kind to me, Godwin. You are my only friend, the only man living from whom I would take help or pity. Ah,

if you knew, if you but knew what you are to me, you would not be unkind."

"Who brought this letter?" Godwin asked the call-boy.

"An elderly lady. She is waiting in the hall."

The aunt, no doubt—the weak and futile aunt, whose only suggestion in distress was a pint of champagne. Godwin hurried to the hall, and found her standing there, just inside the stage-door, curiously observed by the doorkeeper, who knew her as Miss Fountain's aunt.

"Please tell your niece that I will call upon her as soon as the rehearsal is finished," he said.

"Will that be long, sir?"

"I fear I may not be free till after four o'clock."

"My poor girl will break her heart before you come. She is in the depth of despair, poor child. An earthquake couldn't be more unexpected. Figure to yourself, Mr. Godwin, while we were sitting at dinner last night, cosy and comfortable, there came a loud single knock, and two disgusting creatures marched in and took possession of the house. Fanny and I fled upstairs to escape the sight of them. One of the wretches put his dirty paw upon her arm when he handed her a bit of paper—a writ or a judgment or something. She has been sobbing her heart out ever since, and if you knew how she cried over that letter you wouldn't wonder that it is blotted and badly spelt. She never was good at spelling, poor child, though she was better at French and Italian than any of her schoolfellows."

"Tell Miss Fountain I will come as soon as possible."

He hurried away, overwhelmed with the spinster aunt's loquacity, and anxious to get back to the stage.

It was past four when he got to Hertford Street, and he had only two hours of liberty before he must be on the stage as Richard, and this trouble of Miss Fountain's was to the last degree disturbing. They had acted much together. She had been his Ophelia, his Desdemona, his Cordelia, always charming, carrying her audience with her by her beauty. A certain helplessness, and a childlike candour which made her seem younger than she really was had appealed to him; and now in her trouble he thought of her with the tender pity he might have felt for a child.

He had stopped in Bedford Square to put his cheque-book in his pocket, and to beg his mother not to wait dinner. He might be detained on business, and would take a sandwich in his dressing-room if he was short of time. He was out of the house in a flash, before Sarah could question him.

The door in Hertford Street was opened by a lady's maid who looked like a bad copy of her mistress—dressed in Miss Fountain's cast-off silk, and with her hair arranged in the same fashion—pert, pretty, and slovenly.

The broker's man was in the dining-room, and the maid took the visitor upstairs, where Godwin had time to receive a vivid impression of the lady's drawing-room while he waited for the lady.

He had seen a good many drawing-rooms, and a few boudoirs, since he had been the fashion, but he had never seen a room so full of useless things, and so wanting in space for comfort, in chairs meant to sit upon, and in tables designed for use. Every kind of ornament, every gimcrack that had been in vogue in the last decade was to be found there, everything eccentric, expensive, and fragile.

"My mother was right," Godwin thought, "the room is like the poor girl's mind—an assemblage of useless prettiness, idle thoughts, childish vanities."

Light, swift footsteps sounded on the stairs, with the flutter of muslin skirts, and Fanny Fountain was in the room.

Her pale gold hair fell over her shoulders in picturesque disorder, and the streaming hair and long, loose muslin gown reminded him of that first night when she had burst upon him in her romantic beauty as Ophelia; and there was a look in her eyes that made him think—"Yes, Ophelia in the fourth act."

"You have come—I knew—I knew that you would come!"

"How could I refuse? And now, what am I to do for you?"

"Tell me how to get that odious man out of my house."

"I think there is only one way of doing that," he answered quietly.

She had taken both his hands, and stooped over them and kissed them.

"Dear Miss Fountain, let us be business-like," he said gravely.

"Business-like, when my heart is bursting with gratitude?"

"Gratitude! And I have done nothing."

"You have come to me. That is enough."

"I will see this man, and find out what is to be done. Your maid said he was in the dining-room. You know I am acting to-night, so I have very little time. I must go to him at once."

"But you'll come back when you have seen him?"

"Yes, you shall hear the result of our interview."

He went downstairs, and was gone for about a quarter of an hour, while Miss Fountain paced the room, and pushed the



furniture about, and looked at the gimcracks, and cried, and dried her eyes, and looked at herself in more than one glass, and arranged the picturesque disorder of her hair, and powdered her face with a puff that was kept in a silver box on the mantel-piece. Then she started and turned pale at the sound of the street-door shutting.

He had gone, and left her to her troubles. Cruel, unmanly ! No, it was his step on the stair, his hand opening the door.

"The bailiff's man is gone, and your dining-room is free," he said as he came into the room.

She flung herself into his arms. How could a woman of her temperament do less ?

"Oh, you are wonderful," she cried. "My friend, my guardian angel. How did you save me from the disgrace of that wretch's presence ?"

He led her to the nearest chair, and placed her in it.

"There was only one way. I have paid Mrs. Marabel's bill, and you are free from that persecution. You can pay me at your leisure, when you have a good engagement. You will not find me an importunate creditor. And now I must say good-bye. It's getting late."

She pointed to a Dresden china clock, a golden dial in a bower of roses with a pair of turtle-doves on the top.

"No, you shall not go till I have thanked you. It is only half-past four."

"And the play begins at half-past six."

"Two mortal hours. You must stay and dine with us. There is to be a chicken ready at five. I have eaten nothing since that wretch came into the house. You must stay, my friend, my benefactor. Oh, Godwin, if you but knew how I worship you."

She had sprung to her feet, trembling with agitation, the pale gold hair flung back from her brow, and her bosom heaving. She flung herself upon his breast with the movement he knew so well—her welcome to Cyprus in the second act of "Othello." How often she had lain upon his breast in that scene ; and she had been no more to him than a shadow, just the dream of a poet, a creature who had never lived, and who would cease to be when the play was done.

And now she was a woman, with a real heart beating against his own, and her soft round arms about his neck.

"I loved you from the first," she murmured, "from that first night when I saw you in the light of the lamps, and your appearance took my breath away ; when those wonderful eyes flashed

upon me for the first time—oh, Godwin, there never were such eyes! I loved you—I loved you—I loved you from first to last. I loved you as Ophelia loved Hamlet—as Desdemona loved Othello. My heart ached with love for you, and you treated me like a bit of dirt—a puppet that just served for the stage-play—not a woman with a heart that could love and suffer. When my arms were round your neck, as they are now, when my head was on your breast, and I could hear your heart beating, there was not one thrill in your veins, not one drop of blood that answered to the fever in mine. You were marble—and yet I went on loving you.”

Speech had come in a torrent, mixed with tears. Her breath came in gasps between the rush of words, and now her sobs were louder, and the storm of words was over. But still her arms clasped him, and her head with the streaming hair was still lying against his heart.

He had been surfeited with praise—admired, followed, flattered, caressed—but never till now had he known what it was to feel a woman’s tears upon his face, a woman’s arms clinging to him, a woman’s lips telling him that he was loved, with the love that makes or mars the fate of man.

For the practised libertine, or for the man of the world, such an experience might have meant very little—a story to be told with ribald laughter, perhaps, after the third bottle; but for Godwin it was a nerve-shattering ordeal. An agonising pity moved him as he released himself from that passionate embrace, and drew Fanny Fountain to the sofa, where he seated himself by her side. His arm supported her, for she seemed nearly fainting, and her head leant against his shoulder.

She was silent now, and her sobs had almost ceased, but her eyes were still streaming, and the hand that clung to his own was burning with fever.

“My dear, dear girl,” he said gently. “I should be less than a man, if I were not moved, and deeply moved, by those wild words of yours. If I were free—if I had not lived for the last year in a dream of unattainable happiness—my heart must have answered every beat of yours—I should have been at your feet in a rapture of gratitude and love. To be so loved by a creature so exquisite—what man could be unresponsive, if he were but heart-whole?”

She snatched away her hand, withdrew herself from his support, flung herself away from him to the farthest end of the sofa.

“Who is it?” she cried passionately. “Not that Latimer—

with her dyed eyebrows—and her shameful goings-on—a scandalous creature! Not her!”

“Good heavens, no!”

“Who is she?”

“These lips will never speak her name.”

“Are you going to marry her?”

“She is as far from me as heaven—but she has killed my heart. Dear Miss Fountain, you and I can never be more than friends; but I will be your true and loyal friend, if you will let me, and after all, friendship is a lovely thing when it is without alloy.”

“Friendship! Lovers or friends! Let me be something in your life. Don’t shut me out, Godwin. I would be your slave—dress myself in a page’s suit and live in your kitchen—anything so that I might see you every day. This half-year since I left Drury Lane has been hell upon earth. Not to see you—not to hear your voice! And to lose the bliss of acting with you! To lose my dream of love. Oh, if you knew how I have suffered.”

“We are to be friends,” he said gently, with a stealthy look at his watch. “Whatever I can do to release you from financial difficulties—to advise you in your profession——”

“Oh, I hate my profession, I hate it. I shall leave the stage.”

“You are too young to think of that.”

“I am sick of it—sick of life—sick of everything.”

“You have been agitated by last night’s trouble. You will think differently to-morrow. And now, good-bye. I have not an instant.”

“Good-bye! And oh, Godwin,” following him to the landing, “as you are kind, forget every word I said just now. My brain was on fire—I was mad—forget, forget!”

“All shall be forgotten, except that we are to be friends.”

“Yes, friends! And I am to see you often—often—often!”

She hung over the banisters, looking after him, and his last vision in the dim light was of tearful blue eyes watching him.

He left her house with a vague sense that he was carrying a burden—a burden of care. He thought of her in all the pauses of the play, and in the midst of that sense of trouble and perplexity, there was a softer feeling, a tenderness for this delicate creature whose arms had been wreathed about his neck, whose tearful face had been pressed against his own. What man could be adamant in such a scene? What man could remember, and not melt with that perilous pity which is too near to love? The memory of her fondness moved him more deeply as the hours went

by, and the thought of her filled his mind, with irritating repetition of a scene that he wanted to forget.

And then there came the thought of what such impassioned love might have made of his life if he had been heart-whole—if there had been no other woman, that other woman who could never be more than an idea—an illusive vision of beauty informed by mind—the very opposite of the soft and caressing loveliness that had been offered to him in the wintry twilight. If it had not been for that proud woman who despised the art for which he lived, and while she lavished compliments upon the actor, showed not the faintest interest in the man. And she had made her bargain. She was selling herself to the highest bidder—to the man who could give her princely rank and pride of place, in the chief city of her world, since, as a papist, Rome must seem to her the central point of the universe, and to reign there the summit of felicity.

And it was for her, for this shadow, that he had put those clinging arms from his neck, had made his formal offer of friendship instead of love.

In the long wakeful hours of the March morning his thoughts were still centred upon Fanny Fountain. Memory recalled all the plays in which they had acted together, from that night of fever when his fate hung in the balance, and when he was startled from self-consciousness by her romantic beauty as Ophelia. He acted the scene again—and heard the soft, low voice. If she were no genius she had at least that charm. He remembered her as Desdemona, when her singular power of tears had made up for indifferent acting. How lovely she had been—and how in every scene they acted together she had offered him her love. He could understand it all now. It was no stage-love that his weeping Desdemona had given him. It was the ardour of a heart too tender for the cold commerce of the theatre, too quick to feel the influence of an impassioned scene.

He had been too much absorbed in the part he played to be conscious of her self-betrayal; but, looking back in the light of yesterday's revelation, he understood, and was moved by that tender confession which had been offered to him night after night.

If he had known then, if he had understood her then, all might have been different. He might have found his lodestar in such love and such beauty, and the perfection of that cold and classic face looking down at him would have counted for nothing. But now it was too late. Those long nights of lonely rambling in the silent streets, those hours of hopeless longing, those dreams

of love returned, and ineffable happiness—and the bitter waking—all that he had thought and suffered for Isabel Beaumont had worn too deep an impression upon his mind for the possibility of cure.

Again and again there came the thought, "I must go down to my grave loving her."

He let some days go by before he went back to Hertford Street, and a little note from Miss Fountain seemed a merited reproach.

"You told me we were to be friends. Is it friendship to let four miserable days go by without coming near me?"

On this he went to her, with his cheque-book in his pocket—for he wanted to place their friendship in an unsentimental light; yet to be rigidly prosaic with a woman whose attitude was passionate adoration was not easy. To concentrate his attention upon the financial situation seemed the only chance of avoiding sentiment. It was eleven o'clock on a bright spring morning, but the windows were shut in Miss Fountain's drawing-room, and there was no sign of the actress or the aunt. He took the liberty of opening both windows, and letting in the fresh morning air upon an atmosphere flavoured with dust and Ess. Bouquet, the Regent's favourite perfume.

"My mother was right. She has careless servants," he thought.

He had not much time for invidious reflections before Fanny came to him. She was wearing a loose white cambric gown with a good deal of Valenciennes lace about her throat and shoulders, and her hair hung loosely as on his last visit, pale gold hair, with a natural ripple, long and abundant, hair unspoiled by powder or elaborate dressing. There were water-drops upon her forehead, and the little natural curls about her temples were wet. Her bare feet had been thrust into blue satin slippers—a detail that happily escaped Godwin, who did not suspect that she had only left her bed when she was told of his visit.

"My dearest friend, how can I thank you for coming to me—and so early, for you who roam the world like an unquiet spirit, betwixt night and morning, as I have heard your enemies say?"

"My enemies?"

"Your brother actors. Is not that the same thing? Do you suppose that I have never heard them talk of you—Campion and Stormont, and Barry, and the rest of them? There was a time when they talked of nothing else. They were all envious, and some of them actually hated you. Even the good-natured ones, like Jack Tilbury, thought your success too rapid. That



was their grievance—to be three-and-twenty and on a pinnacle of fame, while they are plodding with grey hairs, ranting and tearing themselves to pieces for an audience that hardly knows they are alive. How can they help detesting you? Campion would give you real poison in the fifth act of 'Hamlet' if he could bribe the property-man."

"Well, if their dislike can only show itself in saying that I like to work off the excitement of the evening with a solitary ramble after midnight, I have no quarrel with them."

"Ah, but Campion says more than that. He says you must have committed a murder in your early years, and that your guilty conscience drives you into the dark streets when honest men are in bed and asleep."

"That is romantic of him," Godwin said gaily. "He would make a hero of me."

"What do you mean?"

"All murderers are heroes. There are people of fashion who would have sooner met Eugene Aram at a dinner-party than Pitt and Fox."

"Oh, I know what fools we are. I could have worshipped Eugene Aram. His was a lovely murder."

"And now, dear Miss Fountain, let us sit at that table, with pen and ink handy, and let us talk seriously."

They had been standing or moving about the room as they talked, the actress exquisite in her muslin gown, with a perfect throat rising up from a cloud of rich lace, cheeks flushed with gladness, and the sun lighting the gold in her hair.

"No, I shall not sit by your side, Mr. Godwin!"

"What ignorant sin have I committed?"

"You called me Miss Fountain. Is that your notion of friendship? For you, if for nobody else in the world, I am Fanny."

"Fanny! A charming name."

"Then call me by it."

She was smiling at him, her eyes dancing with happiness. To have him there, so kind and gentle, was enough for bliss. She asked no more—being a creature who did not look before and after. The present was all she cared about. He had placed the two chairs side by side, but she drew hers nearer his. She nestled by his side. That was the worst of it. Not for a minute would she let him forget that she loved him—passionately.

"I want you to be grave and business-like," he said.

"I can't. Call me Fanny."

"What does a name matter when I am here as your man of

business—when I want to put your life upon a comfortable footing ? ”

“ Oh, please, let that sleep. Aunt and I have no end of difficulties. We have run into debt somehow without knowing how. She is as much a child about money as even I am ; perhaps because she never had any till I began to earn a big salary. We were both careless. The money came in every week, and we spent it—upon things we wanted at the moment. We paid rent and servants’ wages ; but we neglected the bills from those Bond Street tradesmen, Marabel, and a jeweller, and a woman who sells lace, who were always tempting me, swearing they didn’t want my money till it was quite convenient for me to pay. They were not afraid, they said ; they knew the account was safe. And then when I left Drury Lane the wretches changed their tune, and they have been dunning me ferociously ever since. You paid Marabel for me—she was the worst—odious creature. If I had not been mad that day I should have been half dead with shame at the thought of your lending me all that money. But I shall repay you some day—every guinea. It will be the delight of my life to save money for that sacred debt. Dear and sacred—the money I owe my benefactor.”

“ You shall pay me some day,” he said, with a strange seriousness.

Was he making up his mind about something ? Was he contemplating an act that might change all his life—end all fond romantic dreams, all sick fancies, the agony of longings that were never to be satisfied ? One act of self-renunciation would do all that no battle with heart and mind could do—one impetuous, sudden act would set him free. A mind clouded with tumultuous thought was not calm enough to realise that to win freedom that way would be to make himself a prisoner for life. Sweet, fond creature—too frail for the rough usage of this world—what can I do to help or protect her—unless I make her my wife ?

He addressed himself to the business of the moment. He begged her to bring him all unpaid accounts, and her creditors’ latest letters.

“ Oh, Godwin, why do you want the horrid things ? I shall sink with shame if you see how extravagant I have been.”

“ I want to set you free from these claims, and then you and your aunt can look life in the face—seriously. Mayfair is an expensive place. You might find a cheaper house than this.”

“ In some horrid neighbourhood—a street out of Holborn—or miles and miles away—in Pentonville or Islington.”

"You might find a small house in Surrey or Essex Street, within easy reach of the theatres."

"Oh, I have done with the theatres. Kemble put me off with excuses. His company was too large, his salary list was ruinous. He had no room for me—and I would sooner die than go back to Drury Lane."

"But how are you to live?"

"They worship me at Bath. I would go back to Bath—only——"

She stopped, looking down, with clasped hands and faintly tremulous lips; and he saw the tears stealing from under her lowered eyelids.

"Why not Bath? It is a delightful place."

"It is Siberia, it is Botany Bay—for it is far away from you. I cannot live without seeing you. I was breaking my heart at Bath. I only want to be your friend—forget my madness the other day—only your friend—but I want to be near you—to see you every other day—or if it were only once a week—I could live upon that."

"My dear Fanny, be reasonable. I *am* your friend, and I will always be your friend, near or far; but I must not spoil your career as an actress."

He felt as if he were wandering in a labyrinth—hopeless of finding the way out—or any escape—except that one way which he had thought of a few minutes ago, but which scared him. He felt as if some impulse not in himself was driving him that way.

"I have no career," she said pettishly. "I am sick of the stage. But if I am to act, it must be in London, near you."

"Then we must get you an engagement in London. I know Kemble has more actresses than he can afford to pay; but there is the Haymarket, and there is Elliston's theatre."

"On the other side of the river. Horrid!"

"But let us finish the business we have in hand. Where are those tradesmen's accounts?" Godwin urged, drumming on the table with long, thin fingers.

Her childishness was beginning to affect his nerves. She was foolish, and even perverse; and he felt it would be hard work to be conscientious and yet kind.

She had no idea where those bills were. Her aunt might be able to find them. As for the dunning letters, she had flung them on to the fire.

She ran out of the room, and he heard her calling her aunt,

and running about the upper floor. He paced the room while he waited for her. His nerves were shaken, his mind was full of trouble. What could he do for her? How could he make her happy—or even safe? He had taken too much upon himself. Her impassioned words, her self-abandonment had made him her slave. Till last week she had been nothing to him—a foolish woman, lovely and attractive, with whom his profession had brought him into contact—but who had never appealed to his heart.

She came back at last with the bills, and laid them on the table, and she and Godwin sat side by side to look at them.

The bills were heavy—foolish purchases and extortionate prices. Godwin had dealt with West End shopkeepers; and, though liberal always, and at first reprehensively careless, experience had made him business-like, and he had learnt to deal with overcharges and faulty arithmetic.

His notebook was open, and his pencil at work.

“Roughly, these accounts come to two thousand pounds; but I think I can settle them for a good deal less; and I shall do so with pleasure, if you will promise to be wise in future, and buy nothing that you can’t pay for with ready money.”

“Oh, I mean to be careful—very careful. I have more clothes than I shall want for the rest of my life; and I shall sell all my jewellery.”

“Don’t do that. I can get Stilbrook to take some of the things back—those for which he has charged you treble their value. That will reduce his account.”

“Oh, Godwin, you are not going to pay him?” she cried distractedly.

“Yes, if I can bring him to reason. I will settle with all your creditors, Fanny, so that you can start fair, and keep out of debt.”

“I will die of hunger rather than take credit for a loaf.”

“If you will do without emerald bandeaux and ruby earrings, I think you may find money for bread,” Godwin said, smiling at her.

“But when—how am I ever to pay you two thousand pounds?” she asked, with her clasped hands upon his shoulder.

“It will not come to two thousand. I hope to set you free for half as much.”

“But how and when shall I repay you?”

“When you are an old woman, or when you have married a rich man.”

She sprang up from his side as if she had been shot. "Cruel, cruel, cruel," she cried, walking about the room, with her hands clasped over her eyes.

He knew as he spoke that there was something explosive in his words, but he could not help risking the suggestion.

"You know that I shall never marry—never, never, never. It was heartless of you to say such a thing. You shan't pay my debts. I won't be beholden to you. I can go to prison—as other actresses have done—your offer of friendship was a mockery."

She flung herself upon the sofa, and buried her face in a cushion, her hair streaming.

"Why did you plague me about those bills? You are only a friend! Could I let a friend pay my debts? Of course not. You don't love me. I am nothing to you."

She was trying to control herself—struggling with sobs that shook her delicate frame.

"I am not going to be mad, as I was the other day. You are my friend. It is the coldest word in the dictionary—only my friend. Leave me, Godwin. I know you mean to be kind, but I am nothing to you. When we were acting together, when you were holding me in your arms, straining me to your heart, on the stage, you were scarcely conscious of my existence in the green-room, you passed me at the wing without seeing me. Remembering those days—ah, too vividly!—what can I think of your friendship? I know that I am nothing to you. I have humiliated myself. I have no womanly pride. I am in the dust at your feet. But I won't accept your money."

She had slipped from the sofa while she was sobbing out her passionate words, and she was at his feet, her arms clasped round his knees, her head hanging, her face hidden by the streaming hair. Her attitude horrified him. She was too like the typical Magdalen—the lost woman, whose only virtue was humility.

"Fanny, for pity's sake! You shock, you distress me."

He lifted her to her feet, with those slender arms and nervous hands that were strong as steel.

"My dearest girl, what can I do to prove my friendship?"

"I won't have your friendship—it crushes—it kills me. I will have nothing but your love."

"But if it is not mine to give——"

"Let me be your slave—your odalisque. I will make you love me."

"Oh, my dear, with what kind of love?" he asked coldly,



but with infinite sadness. "Not the love that is light from heaven. *That* is not given to an odalisque. I came here this morning with a calm and steadfast mind—thinking of how best I could help you through your difficulties; and now you have unhinged yourself and me, and we are losing the power to think a way out of your troubles—to make the future smooth and happy."

"I can never be happy. I wish I were dead, and out of your way."

She was calmer, and was sitting on the sofa where he had placed her. Her hands were clasped upon her knee, and her head was drooping—a statue of grief—but no longer that deplorable image of the repentant sinner, grovelling in the dust.

The sight of her grief—the thought of her helplessness—and his power over her, were infinitely distressing to the man she loved. He who had so grieved for the death of his dog, who had shed tears at parting with an old horse, how could he harden his heart against a woman in the dust at his feet?

"Fanny," he said, in a low, sweet tone that thrilled her, "there is only one way out of our difficulty. Perhaps you are right. A friend could hardly pay your debts without scandal—a husband can. Be my wife, dear, and I will take care of you for the rest of your days. I cannot give you a man's first love; but I can protect you, and make your life happy. No, no, not there," as she slipped to his feet. "Be reasonable, dear."

As he lifted her from the floor she sat on his knee, and put her arm round his neck, and with the hand that was free she pushed the loosely falling hair from his forehead, and gazed at him with ineffable love; and in his heart there was a pity so tender and intense that for the moment it seemed to him that he loved her.

And then a horrible thought flashed across his brain.

What had he done, how had he engaged himself, knowing nothing of this woman except that she was loving and lovely?

He put her arm gently from his neck, and stood up, one hand holding her. He led her towards the window, and looked at her searchingly in the cold March daylight. He was very pale, and very grave.

"I have something to say that will wound you," he said slowly; "but it is something that must be said, a question that must be asked, if you are to be my wife."

She shivered as if he had hit her.

He held her a little way from him, grasping both her arms

with the masterful hands she knew so well—Othello's hands—and they stood facing each other, with pale cheeks, eyes looking into eyes.

"Fanny Fountain, you know that cruel things have been said about you and the Prince. I have never believed in the slander—no, dear, I have never listened to your slanderers—but a week ago we were nothing to each other, and it was easy for me to think well of a charming woman. To-day you are to be my wife, and we are standing face to face with each other as we may stand before the judgment-seat. Answer me, as you would answer at that great Day, answer as you would answer before your Judge. Can you be an honest man's wife? Was there never anything in your friendship with the Prince of Wales that should prevent my taking you to my heart?"

"Of course he admired me," she faltered, her lips trembling. "Everybody knew that."

"Answer," he said fiercely, and his grip upon her arms tightened. "Answer—truly—as God hears you. Are you an honest woman? It is life or death."

Yes, it was life or death for Fanny Fountain. There comes a moment sometimes in the life of a woman when fate hangs upon a word—the truth or a lie—and she has to decide on the instant. Shall she be brave and tell the truth, and let her only chance of happiness go? Or shall she be bold, and tell the lie? Shall she think of God's for-ever, or of a few years' felicity upon this speck of dust we call the world?

"Answer me—answer me, Fanny. Every moment implies a doubt."

"No, the Prince was nothing to me—nothing—nothing. I never cared for him. He ran after me—he helped to make me the fashion. He sent me presents——"

"And you sent them back?"

"Of course—by his equerry."

She looked him in the face resolutely. Her blue eyes were wide open, her mouth was firm, her head was high. It was life or death! The lips were resolute, but they were deadly pale.

"I believe you," he said, and his grasp relaxed. "I trust you, my dear; and I will do all I can to make you happy."

They sat down side by side, his hand still holding her, for she had looked as if she would fall fainting at his feet. She was quite calm now, silent and serious for the moment, no

longer the creature of impulse, whose vehemence had scared him. She was composed and grave, but her lips were still white.

"No, Godwin," she said, in a low voice, "you must not marry me. I could never make you happy. It would be hateful—a marriage of pity."

"No, my dear; it would be a marriage of affection."

Her face lighted up, as if the sun had shone upon it, and her colour began to come back, faintly at first, the wild-rose pink that was one of her charms.

"Oh, God, how noble you are! Affection! How sweet it sounds, and how little it means. I will *make* you love me. The time will come when there will be no talk of affection, when the bond between us will be love—passionate love."

She did not see his smile, as he listened to her—the slow smile, with a shade of irony—as of one who heard of futile hopes, dreams that were never to come true.

"And you will not let that other woman come between us?"

"The other woman? No, *she* will not trouble us."

"Oh, Godwin, how happy you have made me," she said softly. "Let me fetch my aunt. How surprised, how delighted she will be."

"Not now, dear; but I will come to-morrow afternoon, and your aunt and I will have a quiet talk together."

"Poor old auntie! She won't much like my marrying."

"Why not?"

"Well, she has lived with me, don't you see, and taken care of me and my money."

Godwin did not think much of the lady's care of either niece or cash. A notable chaperon, who had left him alone with Fanny all that morning, and had not put in an appearance for five minutes—even as a formula.

This actor, this Bohemian, who had run wild in the Forest, was a stickler for the proprieties. He had an innate refinement that needed no teaching. And he had seen a good deal of the world in his three years in London, the chosen companion of distinguished people. He had a mind peculiarly receptive—as Shakespeare had—who could hold horses one year, and the next write like a fine gentleman. Godwin was a fine gentleman, as Shakespeare was, by a rare instinct that was better than experience.

He was almost in love with his future wife, when he left Hertford Street; yet the burden that he carried was heavier than the last time that door closed upon him.

He had much to do, and in a short time ; for he had told Fanny that they were to be married as soon as possible. He had taken this frail vessel into his charge, and he wanted to bring her to a safe harbour. He had much to do to make their way smooth. He had to reconcile his mother to the marriage—a difficult matter, perhaps, since she started with a prejudice against Miss Fountain. His house was large, much too large for himself and Mrs. Merritt. He thought of the spacious rooms that had never been occupied—which were not even furnished. Oh, there was space and to spare ! But could those two women be happy together in any house ? Would spacious rooms make up for want of sympathy ?

And then he told himself that Fanny had a charm of manner and a lovable nature that must prevail over his mother's prejudices. A slovenly house, a drawing-room undusted. Were those unpardonable sins in youth and beauty ? When she was his wife he could mould that tender creature to his heart's desire. At nine-and-twenty she was still a child, with a child's trivial faults and fond impulses. She would grow into a woman when she was a wife. He told himself that he had nothing to fear. Such love as Fanny gave him—love without measure—was enough for any man—something that a man might long for all his life, and never obtain.

With the sense of obligation, with the knowledge that he had pledged himself for life, he grew fonder of the creature who was so fond of him. She had won him as his terrier had won him—by love alone.

He could reconcile Sarah Merritt to the marriage. When had she ever failed him ? He remembered what she said after she sold the van. " It had to be."

In this case also, she would recognise the necessity. He had to marry. He was a man—in the pride of manhood, ardent, romantic. He who could not stoop to be happy with a mistress must needs have a wife. Sarah had told him that he ought to be married. She had seen how barren his life was, even at the pinnacle of fame. The struggle was over, the crown was won ; but the day of satiety was drawing near—the sickness of heart that comes when our desire is got without content.

He had to secure his mother's kindness for his wife ; and he had to dispose of Fanny's spinster aunt. Upon this point his purpose was fixed. Miss Lavinia Fountain must vanish. He was not going to be cruel. He could not turn a woman of fifty-five out of her niece's house, to poverty and homelessness—

but from his married life Miss Fountain must disappear. This would be the purpose of that serious talk which he was to have with the lady next morning.

"Oh, how white and tired you look," Sarah said to him, when they met at the dinner-table. "It's lucky you haven't to act to-night."

"Yes, mother, it's lucky."

"Oh, my dear, I'm afraid you're ill."

"No, mother, only worn out. I have had an agitating morning. Give me a glass of Madeira, before I attack the fish. I have something to tell you after dinner."

"Something dreadful?"

"Dreadful! No, ma'am, something full of promise and hope."

"Godwin; what is it?"

She flushed, and then grew pale, and he could see that she was trembling.

"Won't you wait till we have dined?"

"Yes, I can wait."

"Then give me a slice of that excellent beef, and let me see you help yourself, dear."

She struggled with her agitation and overcame it. She carved the sirloin for him, and took care that he had everything that he wanted. The maid-servant usually retired after having placed the dishes on the table, and Godwin and his mother waited upon each other, just as they had done at the little round table in the van. It was an element in their happiness, to remember the old days.

They dined in a shorter time than usual; but to Sarah the meal seemed to last for ages, and the maid who cleared the table was intolerably slow. One would not have minded so much perhaps, if the creature had not tried to be slow, or at least appeared to lengthen out every movement, lifting a fork or spoon as if it were a living thing that must be handled with delicacy.

"Will you ever have done, Elizabeth?" Mrs. Merritt cried at last, bouncing up from her chair, and opening the door to let out the girl and her tray. "You are the slowest young woman that ever came into a house. There, get along with you. I'll put the decanters on the table."

She shut the door, and then came to Godwin, breathless with emotion.

"Something full of promise and hope," she said, repeating his own words.



He had risen from the table, and was standing in front of a window. She laid her hands lightly on his shoulders, and stood looking at him with infinite love.

"Those words can only mean one thing. You are going to be married."

"Yes."

The monosyllable was uttered in so low a tone that she scarcely heard it, but she read the answer in his face. Oh, what a serious face for a triumphant lover!

"You don't mind, mother?"

"Mind! I am glad—glad with all my heart. Why, you know I have wanted you to marry ever since you have been a great man. You will be happier and safer with a wife. You will have two foolish women to take care of you, instead of one. At least, if I am still to live with you. But perhaps there will be no room for me when you are married."

"No room—in this big house? If I had nothing but a four-roomed cottage you should have half of it."

"Oh, how good you are! And now tell me all about the lady. Is she very beautiful?"

"Yes, she is beautiful."

"And very young?"

"Nine-and-twenty."

"Four years difference; and on the wrong side."

"She is younger than her years."

"You would be sure to think her so; younger than she is, prettier than she is, better than she is, everything that lovers think. No matter, dear. I shall love her for your sake."

How grave he looked in the waning light—how serious and how sad.

"Tell me all about her, Monkey—her name, her parents, the colour of her hair and eyes—everything."

"There is not much to tell you, mother. You know her."

"I know her, do I? Lady Sophia Lambert? I knew she would have you, if you asked her. Miss Alderson, the heiress? She as good as told me she loved you."

"Neither of those would marry an actor. No, mother. My Ophelia, my Desdemona, the woman I acted with for three years, is to be my wife."

"Miss Fountain?"

Her eyes grew wide with horror.

"Fanny Fountain, the sweetest, most lovable woman I have ever met, as she is the most fascinating."

"She fascinated the Prince," muttered Sarah Merritt with a sad brow.

"Mother, I know the debt I owe you, as well as you know what you have done for me ; but if you repeat that odious slander the bond will break."

Sarah Merritt was silent for moments that seemed long. Then, gulping down a sob, she hid her face on Godwin's shoulder.

"I will love the woman you love," she said in a very low voice, the words coming slowly ; "never doubt that. All she has to do for me is to make you happy. Ah, my dear, my dear, I always knew it had to be."

"What do you mean ?"

"When I saw you acting together, night after night, those blue eyes looking up at you, those white arms round your neck, I thought it would have to be."

And then, seeing the distress in his face, she added softly : "Never fear, Monkey. We'll all be happy together, you and your wife and I."

"Ah, mother, you are always the same. You have never failed me."

## CHAPTER XVI

GODWIN went next morning to his task in Hertford Street, with a resolute mind, if not with a light heart. He meant to devote the afternoon to Miss Fountain's creditors. The morning was for Miss Fountain's aunt.

He was evidently expected by that lady, for she received him in a smart cap and gown, and the drawing-room was almost tidy.

"Fanny has told me," she said, giving him both her hands, which were laden with rings more various than valuable. "Fanny has told me. She is a lucky girl!"

"It is the man who is called lucky in these cases, dear madam."

"And so you are, an uncommonly lucky fellow, to have such a beautiful creature over head and ears in love with you. Think how she might have married, if she hadn't fallen in love with you the very first time you acted together."

"Do not let us talk of the past. We have the future to think of. We are to be married as soon as possible."

"You are so ardent—such a fiery lover!"—which was the last thing Godwin looked like, or felt like, at the moment.

"I am to see your niece's creditors to-day, and hope to clear off all her obligations. I conclude that the accounts you were kind enough to find for me yesterday include all her indebtedness."

"Yes, all!" resolutely. "Or there might be two or three other bills—quite tiny," she added, with gentle hesitation.

"Please let me have every claim, however small. My wife must have no debts."

"You are so generous!"

"Then there is this house to be got rid of—and all this furniture to be sold."

"All!" dejectedly. "Such lovely things, and so expensive!"

"They ought to realise a round sum."

"To recoup you for what you are going to pay her creditors?"

"I want no repayment from my wife. Your niece will do what

she pleases with her money. If there is any of this furniture she would like to keep—there is plenty of room for it in Bedford Square.”

“Yes, you have a noble house there. Poor Fanny has only been inside it once, when she called upon your mother. Her visit was not returned for ages ; and it was never repeated.”

“My mother is not ceremonious ; but she is kind. She will love my wife dearly, and I hope will be loved by her.”

“Fanny will idolise her, if you desire it. And will the dear old lady still live with you ? ”

“My mother is only a little past fifty—I never call her old. I think Fanny will understand her, and love her. She will always share my home. I am her only son, and she is quite alone in the world.”

“Like poor old me,” sighed Miss Lavinia Fountain ; “and I have no son. A spinster’s old age is a sad lot, Mr. Godwin.”

“Your lot shall not be all sadness, Miss Fountain——”

“Pray, pray call me Aunt Lavinia. I shall be your aunt when Fanny is your wife.”

“Naturally—and it will be my privilege to assist in any plan you may make for your life, when you leave this house.”

“Oh, I have no plan—I cannot realise my future existence without Fanny. I sacrificed everything when I left Falmouth to please her. I had a delightful circle of friends—I knew all the best people in the place.”

“Perhaps you would like to go back to Falmouth,” suggested Godwin with a sunny smile.

“Go back ! To be looked down upon as the aunt of a famous actress. Not a creature in the place would call upon me. I was somebody when I lived at the vicarage—mistress of my brother’s house. But that child went on her knees to me. She thought of nothing but the stage—she recited Shakespeare from morning till night, in the garden where there was nobody to hear her, or wandering on the seashore, or on the hills with me. I saw that she was a genius, and I risked everything to give her the chance she was pining for. My brother never forgave me. He died two years after Fanny and I came to London. He had forgiven his daughter, and had written kindly to her ; but he wouldn’t forgive me, though but for me she would have died of a broken heart in his vicarage, instead of winning fame and fortune as an actress.”

Fortune ? Godwin’s mobile eyebrows went up in an involuntary query. Fortune was perhaps represented by this

costly furniture which he did not admire—and by certain jewels that he had seen her wear on the stage—not stage jewels.

“ But about your future, Aunt Lavinia ? I want to discuss that with you before Fanny joins us.”

“ You are wise, she is so impulsive—and so fond of me. She would want to find room for me in Bedford Square.”

“ That is impossible.”

“ Yet the house *looks* enormous.”

“ It is not a question of houseroom. I want to have my wife to myself.”

“ But there will be your mother.”

“ My mother is a model housekeeper, occupied with domestic affairs from breakfast till dinner. She will never come between Fanny and me.”

“ But *I* should,” whimpered Miss Fountain, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

“ My dear lady, partings are always hard. Don’t make this one harder. You will come to us sometimes, I hope, as a guest ; but it is better for every reason that you should have a home of your own—and I am here to discuss ways and means with you.”

The spinster sniffed, and dabbed her eyes with a ragged lace handkerchief.

“ I am the last to intrude where I am not wanted, Mr. Godwin, and however much my niece may want me with her after her marriage—as I know she will, poor child—I shall not trouble *your* house, or interfere with your mother’s housekeeping. I dare say she is much better at that than I am—she was brought up to it, perhaps, which I was not. I am not quite penniless, Mr. Godwin. I shall not be an encumbrance. I have fifty pound a year in Consols—I have never cost my niece anything—I shall find a cot in some pretty village in Bucks or Hertfordshire, and I can maintain myself upon my own income, without being under an obligation to anybody.”

“ I have been too candid,” Godwin said apologetically. And then, taking the spinster’s hand, he continued seriously, in his grave, kind voice, and with the smile that women loved, “ nothing was farther from my thoughts than to be ungracious, or to make a barrier between your niece and you ; but if our married life is to be happy, we must be all the world to each other. If you think you would like a country home, Fanny and I will do our best to make your life pleasant. You could not live comfortably on your small means, even in the country, so you must allow



me to add a hundred a year to your income, and Fanny shall pay the rent of your cottage."

"You are the most generous of men," sobbed Aunt Lavinia, seizing his reluctant hand and kissing it. "I must say again and again, my niece is a lucky girl."

Fanny peeped in at the door at this moment.

"Have you finished your secrets?" she asked coquettishly.

"Yes, dear, Mr. Godwin has disposed of me."

She could not deny herself this flash.

"Disposed?"

"He has planned my future; a cottage in the country—a hundred miles away from you."

"I am not ungrateful, aunt, and I shall always love you, but I want no one in the world but him—I wish he and I were going to live on a desert island."

"You will not be alone; you will have Mrs. Merritt to keep house for you."

"Dear soul. She will keep our house admirably, and make our servants work, which you and I have never been able to do."

"I was not brought up to it," murmured Lavinia, and then, conscious of base ingratitude, she added, "Mr. Godwin has been most kind, most princely, and we are not to be really parted—I am to visit you in Bedford Square sometimes."

Fanny seemed absolutely indifferent. She was looking at Godwin as if the world held no one else.

To-day she was neatly dressed, and was no longer *la belle éplorée*. She wore a short-waisted gown that set off her graceful figure, and a large muslin collar, and her hair was dressed high upon her head in clustering curls surmounted by a blonde cap with a pink satin bow. She had dressed herself to please her lover, and looked as fresh as a newly opened flower on a spring morning. She was dressed as Lawrence had painted her when she was eighteen, and the rage. Godwin had seen an engraving of her portrait, which was after the style of Greuze, but he had not seen the painting.

"You look lovely," he told her. "Like Lawrence's picture."

"Oh, I was nine years younger when he painted me."

"What has become of the portrait? Is it in this house?"

"Oh no, it never belonged to me."

"To whom, then?"

"To the painter, I suppose. Sir Thomas asked me to sit to him, and I was too vain to refuse. No doubt he kept the picture—

and when he dies it will be sold among a lot of other things—portrait of a young lady, name unknown. Such is fame ! ”

She spoke with gay laughter, and an anxious face.

“ I must have that portrait. I’ll call upon Sir Thomas.”

“ No,” she cried vehemently, “ you shan’t waste your money. He would ask two or three hundred guineas. What do you want with my picture when you have me ? ”

She laid her head upon his breast, devoted, adoring, happy—though two minutes before she had been curiously troubled. Aunt Lavinia had disappeared, and they were alone, as they had been yesterday, but to-day all was calm. The storm of passion was over—triumphant love sparkled in her happy eyes, and flushed her cheeks, as she nestled against the breast that was to defend her from all the ills of life.

She had won him—by what sacrifice of womanly pride, at what cost of self-respect, she did not stop to think. She had won him : the man for whose sake she had been living in a fever of love, and thinking all other men hateful. He was hers—and though from time to time woman’s natural coquetry might show itself in light speech or tormenting smiles, she was at his feet, morally, as she had been yesterday when she grovelled there.

She had won him. Sitting by her side to-day, hand locked in hand, it almost seemed to him that he had found the wife he wanted. If he was not in love with her, at least he was fond of her—and grateful for her love.

“ Why should any man long for a goddess ? ” he thought, musing in a pause of silence. “ Is it not better to have a woman, like this—so tender, so human, and so sweet ? ”

Godwin devoted the rest of that day to business. He settled accounts with Miss Fountain’s creditors, he saw her landlord, and arranged for giving up the house. Her lease had three more years to run ; but if she would find a responsible tenant the owner would accept the surrender.

“ The rent is high,” Godwin said. “ It may be difficult to find a tenant.”

“ Not in Hertford Street. I might be tempted to take less, perhaps, from a substantial tenant, for a longer term. My rent has not been paid regularly for the last three or four years.”

This business done, Godwin went to the City. There was one other person whom he must tell of his approaching marriage, and that was his old friend O’Brien. Here again he might expect disapproval ; might be put upon his defence, and have to give reasons.

The Duchess of Pentland was not in London. Her Duke had been ailing since Godwin saw him, and they had gone to Rothesay for the spring.

Her absence was a relief for Godwin, who must needs have given his confidence to a friend for whom he had been like an adopted son. He knew that she would disapprove of his choice. She was prejudiced against actresses; and she had often spoken disparagingly of Fanny Fountain.

Patrick received him with open arms. "What has become of you for the last three days? I called twice in Bedford Square, and you were out. I asked if you were at rehearsal—no—or I would have looked you up at the theatre. Are you game for a midnight ramble? There's a foine moon. Let's go up to Hampstead, and see her looking for Endymion on the heath."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"With pleasure. Dine with us at five—we'll go and see the play at Covent Garden. We can take an oyster supper in the Strand, and start for the heath while the moon is high."

"Sit down, spalpeen. You look tired, and a trifle paler than I loike to see ye."

Godwin dropped into the nearest chair.

"I have had a busy day. I am going to be married."

The sentence was short and sharp, like a pistol shot.

"The devil you are? Are ye as lucky as the Shepherd on Latmos? Has your moon come down from the skies?"

"My moon is as remote as ever—only to be remembered in a dream. I am to marry a very woman—who loves me, and whom I love."

"Your last words sound like an afterthought," said O'Brien, suddenly serious.

"A man thinks of himself last. I am going to be married as soon as I can set my house in order."

"With Mrs. Merritt that wants no setting. I never saw a house so beautifully kept."

"True. I should have said, as soon as I can arrange business details. I should like to be married in your church, Pat, if it's agreeable."

"It's more than agreeable. Yes, I'll tie the knot; and it's glad I am you're going to have a wife to keep the black dog away. Your melancholy fits have made me unaisy. But you've not been after telling me about the lady. Who is she? An heiress—or a duke's daughter, at the least?"

"The lady is Miss Fountain?"

There was a silence—only of moments—but it seemed long.

"Oh!" said O'Brien. "That's quite settled, I suppose?"

"As much as if you had tied the knot already."

"Then there's nothing more to be said."

They shook hands, heartily on O'Brien's part, though he could not conjure up a smile. He noted that Godwin's hand lay in his inertly, and was very cold. They then proceeded to discuss details.

The Vicar was to find respectable lodgings in his parish where Miss Fountain and her aunt could reside when they left Hertford Street, while a room hired and a carpet-bag left in it for fourteen days would make Godwin a parishioner.

The marriage could take place in a fortnight or three weeks.

"Will ye be wanting a lot of company in the church, and a Lord Mayor's feast after it?"

"No, Pat. I should like you to marry us at nine o'clock in the morning. I shall have to act in the evening, and I don't want my audience to get wind of my marriage. We must postpone our honeymoon till the end of the season."

"Will the lady like that?"

"She accepts my engagements when she accepts me."

"Well, you're wise not to make a raree show of your wedding. If 'twas known in London that Hamlet was going to marry Ophelia, neither my church nor the street outside would hold the mob that would come to see the fun."

"We must cheat the mob of their raree show."

O'Brien promised to find lodgings, and to see to all details. He dined with Godwin, and they went to Covent Garden together, and saw Kemble play Coriolanus; and after supper they took their favourite walk to the Heath on the hill, and talked long and with open heart, as they had talked in the Forest glades, when Godwin was a boy; talked of things that belonged to the immensities, far away from the narrow human life of passions and sins, loves and sorrows. They talked of things that men can talk of without striking a knife into each other's heart: and they parted on Godwin's doorstep with a cordial clasp of hand; but in all that time neither of them had sung the praises of Fanny Fountain, nor had Godwin once raved, as lovers do, about the one woman in the world. Sublime abstractions had kept them remote from earth.

On the following day the actor was occupied with his profession. He had to rehearse in the morning, and to act Richard

at night, and could therefore pay only a short visit to his sweetheart.

He found her agitated and angry. Her aunt had been officious, and had taken a liberty she could not pardon.

"I acted for the best; and anybody in the world but Fanny would have been grateful," said Aunt Lavinia, with an injured look.

Her elderly eyelids were red and swollen, and Godwin saw that there had been a scene between aunt and niece.

"Anybody else would have thanked me for doing such a good stroke of business; but Fanny always behaves like a spoilt child," protested the aunt.

"I didn't want my house and furniture sold over my head," said Fanny, "and to a woman I detest."

"Please tell me all about it," Godwin said quietly.

"*She* can tell you," said Fanny, in her sullen voice, flinging herself into a chair, and turning her back upon her lover.

Godwin had heard the sullen voice before, in the theatre, addressed to other people. It was a shock to hear it to-day.

After a good deal of questioning Aunt Lavinia explained the cause of quarrel.

Walking in the direction of the theatre yesterday afternoon, she had happened to run against Miss Latimer, who stopped to talk, and insisted on taking her to her lodgings, which were close by, for a cup of tea.

"It was five o'clock, and I was feeling faint, so I let myself be persuaded. Susan Latimer and I have always been friendly. She is open-hearted and generous. Of course, I know nothing about her morals, or where her money comes from, and I have taken care to keep Fanny from getting intimate with her. She was curious as to Fanny's engagements after her success at Bath. Had she had an offer from Covent Garden? I perhaps went a little farther than I should have done in telling her my niece was going to leave the stage, and hinting, only just hinting, that she was going to be married—not a word as to the husband. She tried to get that out of me—but I was mum."

"You had no business to utter my name to a woman I abhor," said Fanny over her shoulder.

"Upon this, Latimer asked me if Fanny would live in this house after her marriage, and I said no; her new home would be in a much larger and handsomer house, and then, little by little, I told her of the three years that the lease had to run, and how we were going to sell the furniture, and that we wanted some-



body to take the house off our hands. 'I'll take the house, and I'll buy your furniture,' that impetuous young woman cried out. 'I'm sick of lodgings, and Surrey Street is a hole. I ought to be at the West End.'

"She asked me what my niece would want for the furniture, and as good as said she would give us our own price. She was not one to haggle about trifles, she said. And this," concluded Lavinia Fountain in a higher key, "is all I get for my pains. Fanny may sell the things by auction, and have them given away to a pack of dirty brokers—I won't raise a finger to stop her."

This was all hateful to Godwin. Two women quarrelling about sordid things—another woman of worse than doubtful character to take over his wife's house.

"I can understand Fanny's objection to Miss Latimer as her successor," he said quietly, while Fanny still sniffed and shrugged, and still turned her back upon him.

"I wonder you don't stick up for her," she said. "She's your Desdemona."

"A very good Desdemona; but not a good woman. However, I don't think it can matter who has your house when you have left it. You need not have any dealings with Miss Latimer. I will settle everything for you."

"That's all very well. But I shall hate her having my furniture, and boasting of it. Besides, there are lots of things I won't sell. All the things in this room, for instance. I won't part with one of them," she concluded passionately.

She had risen and stamped her foot as she spoke. Aunt Lavinia was frightened. It was only one of her niece's little tempers—but what if it made Godwin change his mind? His face had darkened, and he looked serious.

"You want to keep all this trumpery?" he said curtly.

"It is not trumpery. The things are all valuable, and I wouldn't part with them for worlds."

"Pray keep what you like. There will be room for your belongings in Bedford Square; but remember I want to get you and your aunt out of this house as soon as possible."

And then he told her how lodgings were to be found for her near St. Elfrida's, and how they were to be married by his old friend—very quietly.

"A church in the City—at nine o'clock in the morning—as if you were ashamed of your choice. And I thought we should have a lovely wedding! Everybody would be interested in our marriage."

" I want to escape everybody. Marriage is a solemn thing, my dear, not a show for fools to gape at."

His unsmiling face—his serious voice—scared her. Her manner changed in a moment. She crept near him, and laid her head upon his shoulder, in her favourite attitude.

" You have not kissed me this morning, George," she said reproachfully.

" You have not given me a chance."

" Forgive me, dearest"—as she put up her lips to be kissed. " I was in a horrid temper. Aunt Lavinia was too provoking—selling every stick of my furniture without consulting me, as if I was a child."

" Haven't you been behaving rather like one ? "

" Kiss me, then. Treat me like a child."

He kissed her. It was a long, lingering kiss, kindness on his side, passionate love on hers.

Everything was easily settled. A van should take all Fanny's choicest treasures to the house that was to be her home ; and Aunt Lavinia was to see the landlord, and hand over Miss Latimer to him. The sale of the furniture could be managed by Godwin's solicitor. The strolling player was now of sufficient importance to need legal help for the drawing-up of agreements with managers—contracts that involved a good deal of money.

" You've made a fool of yourself," Miss Fountain told her niece, when Godwin had left them. " I should have got more out of Susan Latimer than any lawyer will ask her, and he'll pinch off ever so much for his fee. You'd better not give Mr. Godwin another taste of your temper before you're married, or he'll cry off. I could see how your tantrums disgusted him."

Fanny flung herself on the sofa and began to cry.

" Oh, if he knew how I adore him, he could never be angry with me."

" A man may get tired of being adored. You'll be wiser to keep your temper than to cry and make your nose red."

" I'll write to him—no, I'll go to Bedford Square and have tea with his mother."

" Would you like me to go with you ? "

" No. I want to talk to her of her son—we two alone."

Mrs. Merritt received her son's betrothed with open arms, and thanked her for coming. She insisted on showing Fanny the house, from basement to garret, extolling that spacious under-

world of kitchen and housekeeper's parlour, butler's pantry, still-room, and servants' hall.

"You wouldn't find anything like that in Mayfair," she said. "I'm told there's houses where the footmen have to sleep in the entrance-hall."

Fanny sighed as she admired. Everything was very fine, and no doubt grand people had once lived there.

"And do so still," protested Sarah. "There are titles on three sides of the Square."

She showed her visitor two empty rooms on the second floor, large and handsome rooms, overlooking a nobleman's gardens. Fanny looked down at the little garden belonging to the house she was in. A broad flight of stone steps led from a French window in Godwin's library down to a little green enclosure, two oval flower-beds with box borders, and a double row of hazels which Sarah called the avenue.

"Is that the garden where the India merchant cut his throat?" asked Fanny.

"Oh, you've heard that story?"

"They talked of it in the green-room when your son took the house. They were always jealous of him, and loved to sneer at all his doings."

"There's no foundation for the story, except that the man who built the house was rich and had great losses."

"And killed himself. What else could he do? I shall never sit in that garden after sunset."

"You might catch cold if you did—for it faces east."

Fanny was pleased with the rooms. They would hold all her furniture, and china and ornaments, and the Persian carpet that had cost so much, and the wonderful French clock that played tunes, and the Vernis Martin table, and the tulip-wood secrétaire that had belonged to Marie Antoinette, and the four-leaved Indian screen.

"They will look better here than in Hertford Street," Fanny said, and she wondered if Godwin would have the room newly papered for her, with a Chinese paper—vermilion and gold.

"I dare say he'll do anything extravagant you ask him," answered Sarah. "He never thinks of money. But I'm sorry you don't like this pretty paper, with the roses and butterflies."

This was their first difference of opinion, and it passed like a breath of cold air. Five minutes later they were sitting at tea together in the grave old library, in the glow of a winter fire.

Godwin came in and found them there, and Fanny's perversity

of the morning was forgotten in a flash. Nothing could have pleased him better than to find these two women sitting cosily by his hearth. It was a good omen.

He had been rehearsing the "Stranger," a long rehearsal, and a dismal play; but Kemble had acted the part, and the management wanted Godwin to show the town a new reading. Kemble had been statuesque, didactic, and dreary—but Godwin told the Committee he could do little more than his great rival. Fire and passion were out of the question.

"I can only preach the same sermon with a difference," he said.

"Let us have the difference," answered the Committee. "You will be natural and pathetic, and will make the women cry."

"No doubt Latimer will be splendid as Mrs. Haller," Fanny said, when Godwin had kissed her, and thanked her for coming to see his mother.

Sarah had dined early, but the maid appeared speedily with her son's dinner, for which a side-table had been laid ready. He declared he would rather have tea and bread and butter; but his mother was insistent. He had been rehearsing all day, and was to act at night—so he must eat his soup and cutlets. So he sat at the side-table and ate, and was merry, talking to the two women, and telling them the gossip of the theatre, which Fanny was never tired of hearing.

Campion played the Baron, and Mrs. Campion the Countess. Yes, Miss Latimer would be a good Mrs. Haller—wooden, but good. She would make every word audible at the back of the gallery. She would make people cry in the scene with the children.

"Any stick could do that," said Fanny. "She will look very handsome in the part, I suppose?"

"The woman is handsome," said Godwin, "and always looks so. She has a striking stage face, and a fine figure, and a good voice, and that is all. She is handsome, but she is not charming. She has neither true pathos nor spontaneous gaiety."

Fanny brightened. She wanted her lover to tell her that she was the better actress—the more beautiful woman: but this speech was soothing, and assuaged the jealousy that had consumed her ever since Godwin and Miss Latimer had been acting together.

The house in Hertford Street was vacated two days later. All Fanny's belongings, except a couple of trunks, were taken to Godwin's house, and Aunt Lavinia and her niece were established

in very comfortable rooms in a dull street near St. Elfrida's, from which lodging Fanny was to be married. Godwin came to see her every day, and was always kind, and she and her aunt were at the theatre every night when he acted.

They saw the "Stranger" four times, and "Richard the Third" twice.

"I shall not come to see you act again till our wedding night, when you are to play Hamlet," Fanny said.

"You have been bored by the 'Stranger'?"

"Frankly, it is a boring play. Latimer preaches as if she were her namesake at Paul's Cross, and Mrs. Campion as the Countess is a worse stick than I had even imagined her till I saw her from the front."

"And if Mrs. Haller preaches, her husband must be worse."

"Oh, your sermons were delightful. I shut my eyes and listened to your voice. You have such a lovely voice: but it is wasted upon anything less than Shakespeare's finest tirades. Othello's farewell to the pomp and circumstance of war, Hamlet's soliloquy on death."

"My voice was laughed at when I began to act."

"Only by fools without ears—who could not hear the music in it because you pronounced some vowels strangely. Now, if you were to speak quite like other people, your audience would think it a falling-off."

Godwin smiled at her frank criticism. His manner was always kind. He treated her as if she were a petted child. It was the desire of his life to make her happy. He had taken this duty upon him—this burden—of his free will; and he was no shirker. He told himself that she had given him a treasure beyond price—the love that cannot be bought.

He wrote to his Duchess the night before the wedding, telling her of the woman he had chosen; and that he promised himself a future of tranquil happiness.

"You know my dream of another woman, and you would not believe me if I told you I was romantically in love with this one—but you may believe that I am very fond of my sweet wife. She will be my wife in less than a dozen hours. She is beautiful, gentle, and confiding. She loves my mother already; and my mother is ready to dote upon her.

"I hope, when you are next in London, you will allow me to make Fanny known to you. After your kindness to me, I rest assured that you will be kind to her—and, once known to you, I do not doubt her power to win your regard. She has been



successful and admired as an actress ; but as my wife she will have done with the stage, for which she has a growing dislike."

He wrote a long letter, expatiating upon Fanny Fountain's merits and charms. He wanted to make the Duchess her friend and champion. The baseless slanders that track the course of a beautiful woman in a public position would die at a frown from that great lady.

The early morning was bleak and grey, but the sun broke through the clouds as Godwin was dressing, and the sky was bright when he and his mother alighted from the hackney coach that conveyed them to the church.

Fanny came to the altar with no attendant but her aunt, who was to give her away. Godwin had stipulated that there should be no one present but priest and clerk and verger ; but the pew-opener was in the chancel, pushing about hassocks, and amiably officious.

Fanny, in a pale grey silk pelisse and a white chip bonnet, was a bride of whom the coldest lover might be proud. A wreath of white roses surrounded her face, which was almost as pale as the flowers, till at sight of Godwin a lovely carnation flushed her cheeks, and a lovely light shone in her eyes.

O'Brien read the service beautifully, and his little homily at the end was serious and eloquent. His affection for Godwin was breathed in every word of that kindly sermon. It was of the wife's duty, her solemn obligation to make her husband's life happy, her self-abnegation, her constancy, her unshaken fidelity, he spoke most.

"He scarcely said three words about your duty to me," Fanny told Godwin, with a touch of anger. "He read me a lesson—as if you wanted no teaching."

There was a long day before them when they left the church. They were to go to Fanny's lodgings for breakfast, and they were all to dine in Bedford Square, a four o'clock dinner, to allow of the bridegroom being in time for his work at the theatre. Godwin had planned a long drive between breakfast and dinner, and had hired a carriage large enough to hold bride and bridegroom, and the two elder ladies.

Sarah Merritt, however, resigned her seat to Mr. O'Brien, insisting that she had household cares which necessitated her presence in Bedford Square that day. So the coach carried her no farther than her own doorstep, where she bade her son and his wife good-bye till the evening.

They were to drive to Hampton Court, and look at Wolsey's palace, which the bride had never seen.

"A humdrum wedding," Fanny said, with a faint sigh. "It would have been more romantic if we had gone to Gretna Green."

"Sure, I hope I'm a trifle cleverer at tying the knot than a beggarly blacksmith," said O'Brien, "and I think ye'll find my fetters are just as strong as his."

The sun went with them all the way—but it was a wintry sun. Fanny complained of the cold. Her silk pelisse would not have been too warm for June. O'Brien reproved her for her want of thought.

"You young women only think of the clothes you look prettiest in," he said, "and it's after catching a fine big cold you'll be before we get you home."

"We'll try to prevent that," said Godwin, and he stopped the carriage at a draper's in Kensington. The proprietor stepped out into the street to wait upon carriage-folks, and Godwin bought a shawl for his bride, a soft woollen shawl—a black and grey plaid—very warm and thick.

Fanny protested against having it put over her delicate silk pelisse; but her husband's hands wrapped it round her with infinite tenderness.

"His first present," she said, with a queer smile.

"Sure, we all know he's a stingy beggar," said the priest. "He wants to die rich, like Garrick. When he asks me to dinner there's two mutton chops, and he takes the biggest himself."

"You know you're talking nonsense," the bride exclaimed pettishly.

"Well, I think you know that as well as I do."

Fanny began to cry, as the thought of her debts, and the way she had been released from them, flashed across her mind.

"He is the most generous creature on earth, and the noblest and the dearest," she gasped, sobbing.

Godwin looked out of the window, and directed her attention to the Windsor coach, with its team of iron greys, a cheerful spectacle.

There were no more tears after this, but at Hampton Court the bride insisted on leaving Godwin's present in the carriage, and O'Brien pleaded for her liberty in that small matter.

"A woman has a right to look pretty on her wedding day," he said. "We shall be under cover in the Palace, and your wife is too happy to take cold easily. We'll have to walk fast, if we're

to see Wolsey's great hall, and march through all Dutch William's rooms, with the musty old pictures ! ”

The musty old pictures amused neither Fanny nor her aunt, but they both admired the spacious rooms and lofty ceilings, and tall windows overlooking a stately garden.

Fanny said she would like to live in such a house. “ What a privilege it is to be royal,” she sighed, and when she came to Queen Mary's bedroom she was keenly interested in the frail beauties who had been the star-shine of Whitehall, and insisted upon Godwin telling her which of them he thought loveliest. He chose Madame de Grammont, but Fanny, her aunt, and Mr. O'Brien, would have nobody but the Duchess of Cleveland. The face under the helmet, the haughty carriage of the head, were unsurpassed and unsurpassable.

After Queen Mary's bedchamber they went through the rooms as fast as they could, only glancing at the pictures as they passed. They seemed to be the only people in the building, and their footsteps made dismal echoes in the empty rooms. The twilight was growing thick when they left the palace, and there was very little time to look at the goldfish in the pond before the custodians were calling out, and the gates were being shut. It was the bride's fancy to see these goldfish, which her aunt had talked about.

“ They will be more amusing than the pictures,” she said.

They drove home in the grey of early evening, through the long dim street of Brentford, where the only lights were flaring in ginshops and beershops ; past rural villages ; Turnham Green ; Hammersmith ; to aristocratic Kensington ; and then across the Park to Cumberland Gate, and Oxford Street.

It was a long drive, and the bride fell asleep before they reached London, wrapped in her ugly shawl, her bonnet off, and her head on Aunt Lavinia's shoulder, while Godwin and O'Brien talked with lowered voices.

She awoke startled and confused when the carriage stopped, and asked where she was.

“ At home,” said Godwin tenderly.

“ Oh, I am so tired ! ”

He carried her into the lamplit hall, where all was brightness, and where Sarah came to bid them welcome, in her best satin gown, with pink roses in her cap.

The dinner was a banquet—turtle, turbot, capon, champagne. A Lord Mayor's feast in miniature, O'Brien called it. The chief of the hirelings, who waited at Godwin's supper-parties, was

in attendance, looking like a family servant of long standing. He was as familiar with the house as any old retainer, and was proud of his attendance upon the fashionable actor.

"I'm glad you keep a manservant," Fanny whispered, when this man filled her glass for the first time.

She was sitting next her husband at the head of the table, O'Brien being at the other end, between the elder ladies, whom he kept entertained with his cheerful talk.

"I don't," Godwin whispered back. "He is a man we hire for our parties."

"That's a pity," Fanny answered, with a sigh. "He looks such a superior person."

"He is, and he has been very useful to me. He knows what fine people like to eat, and how much they are likely to drink. He has been my guide, philosopher, and friend, since my mother and I began housekeeping."

"It's a pity you don't have him for your butler, with a footman under him."

"We have been very comfortable with our two country-bred maids."

"Only two maids in this huge house!"

"We have found two quite enough. But if you want a third, you shall have her."

"I'm afraid I want a good deal of waiting on," she said, smiling, as if it were a merit.

"I believe my mother would like to wait upon you."

"Would she know how?"

"I think she would. You have no idea how clever she is."

"She looks very kind and good and—yes, she could hardly be your mother and not be clever."

"She has an all-round cleverness that has been the comfort of my life. She helped me through my prentice days in the country theatres; and she has kept my house in a way that has been the admiration of all my friends."

"You have a great many friends, have you not?"

"People have been kind."

"Will they be kind to me? Will they take to me, do you think?"

"They cannot fail to admire you."

"But will they like me? Will they invite me to their parties?" she asked with keen anxiety.

Her mind was full of the new life, and the good things it was to bring her.

"I shall go to no parties to which you are not asked—except men's parties," Godwin answered seriously, and with a sudden cloud upon his brow.

A frivolous wife, hungry for admiration, eager to shine in scenes where she was hitherto unknown, might present a problem.

He had taken this burden upon himself deliberately, moved by a divine pity; but while his wife of a few hours talked to him there came across his mind the horrible thought that cruel things had been said about her by malignant tongues, and that he would have to save her from the consequences of a thoughtless girlhood. There must have been false steps in that flowery path of the young actress, dazzled by an instantaneous success, followed and flattered by the mob of fine people. "Hardly seventeen when she was applauded to the echo in that great theatre," he thought, "little more than a child; and since she is so lovely now, what must she have been eleven years ago?"

"How silent you are," Fanny exclaimed; "one would think we had just come from a funeral."

O'Brien was supplying all the life of the little party. He took wine, first with the bride, and then with the two elders, and last with the bridegroom, uproariously. He kept Mrs. Merritt and Aunt Lavinia in a ripple of laughter. He took a magnum out of the hired butler's hands, filled the glasses of both ladies, and filled his own a second time, before he pushed the bottle across the table to Godwin. He took all the stateliness out of the dinner, and made it a joyous, free-and-easy meal, and then, flushed with good wine, he rose and made the kind of speech that at a wedding feast seems like inspiration, a speech in which there was nothing new or brilliant, but which had a certain rough eloquence, and was neither too long nor too short. A speech that began with laughter, and ended with tears. Godwin had only time for a few hasty words in acknowledgment before he left the table and the house.

They all rose at his going, and Fanny ran out into the hall to bid him good-bye.

"I shall be in front before the curtain rises," she said.

But he begged her to spend the evening at home. His mother would be disappointed, and so would O'Brien, who would stay for tea.

"He is as fond of tea as Dr. Johnson," he told her.

"He has no dislike to champagne," murmured Fanny.

"Not on an occasion. But you must be kind, and make tea



for him, and he will keep you all amused till I come home to supper."

"Five mortal hours," she sighed.

He had no time for more than a kiss. A gentle escape from clinging arms, a door opened and shut quickly, and the sound of hurried footsteps on the pavement; and Fanny went slowly upstairs to the drawing-room, soon to be followed by the rest of the party, who had kept discreetly in the background during this first farewell of man and wife.

The drawing-room was lighted as for one of Godwin's midnight parties, and Fanny, enchanted with everything, took her place by and by at the tea-table, with the air of a queen. She sparkled with happiness—moved by O'Brien's praise of her husband—and the tea-party was even gayer than the dinner had been. After tea a card-table was brought out, and the quartette sat down to whist, a game which Sarah Merritt loved and could play well, much better than Aunt Lavinia, who boasted that she had played with partners so illustrious that she must refrain from naming them. Nobody asked her to name these mysterious gentlemen, but Patrick said bluntly that they must have been men of exceptional patience if she had been as obstinate in not returning their lead, and in hoarding her trumps, as it had been his bad luck to find her.

"I don't know why you were so saving of 'um, ma'am, unless you want to take 'um home with you," he said. "We might have had a see-saw in the last hand, if you'd kept your handsome eyes open."

Fanny, who was a bold bad player, had been Mr. O'Brien's partner for the first rubber, after which there had been an exchange of partners, and a turning of chairs for luck, and Aunt Lavinia had fallen to the parson's lot.

It was a quarter to eleven when the little party broke up, Patrick undertaking to convey Miss Fountain to her lodgings in a hackney coach; and then lights were extinguished and fires allowed to die down in the large rooms, while supper and red firelight and curtained windows in the library prepared a cheerful welcome for the master of the house.

Mrs. Merritt and the bride sat opposite each other in front of the fire, Fanny still in her pale silk pelisse, with ruffled hair, and a feverish spot upon each oval cheek.

"I'm afraid you are almost worn out, my dear," Sarah said gently, smoothing the loose hair from the fair young brow.

"I'm rather tired. It has been a long, long day. I want him back. The world isn't alive when he is away"; and then in a low voice she sang,

" 'The village seems asleep or dead  
When Lubin is away.'

Lubin," she repeated, "what a sweet name for a lover! I think I shall call him Lubin."

"He will be here in half an hour."

"In half an hour," Fanny echoed, with her eyes on the dial of the old clock in a corner of the room.

She watched the face of the clock, red in the reflected fireglow, till the heavy eyelids sank over tired eyes, and the bride of a day was fast asleep.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE fourth act was over, and Godwin was arranging his long black cloak in front of the pier-glass in the green-room. He had been tired when he came into the theatre, exhausted by the emotions of the long day ; but he had acted with more than usual power. The energy, the electrical force that made him different from all other actors had been at the highest point to-night. Black thoughts had haunted him at intervals all through that day, and his only chance of escape was in his dream-world. He flung the burden from him as he walked on to the stage. But now, in this last interval, the shadow of a new care was upon him, and, standing before the looking-glass, deadly pale, and with his height and spare figure emphasised by the long folds of his cloak, the image in the glass seemed a new man—a man who had come to the end of his story, who had done with ambition, as he had done with hope, a man who had nothing left but the slow years that bring age, infirmity, and death.

The house was full, and the audience distinguished, but there were no visitors in the green-room to-night. There were only the actors ready for the end of the play : Campion in his crown and crimson robe as the King ; Mrs. Campion as Queen, with her basket of flowers to scatter in Ophelia's grave ; a slender youth who played Osric with a lisp and a simper, the stereotyped Shakespearian fop, a human marionette ; Tilbury, bluff and burly, as first gravedigger ; and another burly comedian of inferior standing as his subordinate ; Allan as Horatio ; Stephen Barry as Laertes, handsome and animated, eager for his chance in the fifth act.

Godwin heard them talking behind his back, as he arranged his cloak and adjusted the position of his sword-hilt ; heard, without heeding, till a name was spoken that made him turn quickly towards the speakers. The actors were grouped round the fireplace, Mrs. Campion seated, with her velvet shoes on the fender, Barry standing behind her chair, his elbow on the mantel-piece, smiling at himself in the glass, Campion and the others near them.

"In short, Fountain made a deuced good bargain," said Campion, as Godwin turned from the glass. "The sticks cost her nothing; and she sold them to Latimer for seven hundred pound."

"It isn't everybody who can do business in that way," said Mrs. Campion, admiring her instep, as she turned the sole of her shoe to the fire. "We're not as pretty as the famous Juliet was ten years ago, and we haven't a royal purse to dip into, and a royal Romeo to make us the fashion."

There was a one-syllable laugh from the second gravedigger, who was new to the theatre—but nobody else showed any interest in Miss Fountain's affairs.

"Susan Latimer may as well spend the tallow-chandler's money before it melts," Barry said, without looking round. "He's master of his Company this year, and I hope he'll ask me to one of their dinners."

"No one can say that Latimer isn't free with her cash," said Campion, "she's as open-handed as the day; and she has never given herself airs, as the parson's daughter did when His Royal Highness was driving her in his curricule."

"Mr. Campion!"

It was Godwin's voice at its highest power, crashing in upon the group like a pistol-shot. He was standing near the open door, listening for the rise of the curtain. The others turned and looked at him, startled by the voice, and by his aspect as he stood there. His cloak had fallen from his left shoulder, and his right hand was on his sword-hilt.

"What the devil is the matter, Godwin?" Campion asked.

"Only this—you were talking—after your manner—of a lady; and I wish you to know that she is my wife, and that no man shall speak lightly of her when I am by. There are liars enough in the world whose lies I have no power to stop; but no man in this theatre shall slander her in my hearing, without being sorry for it."

"Fanny Fountain? Your wife? That's a joke! Why you always kept her at arm's length. We all know you looked higher——"

"Miss Fountain was married to me this morning, at St. Elfrida's Church in the City."

Campion looked at him with a queer smile. Malicious meaning, malicious exultation, lit up the painted face. The man had hated Godwin from the hour of the young actor's triumph—hated him with a hatred that had grown with the growth of his rival's fame.

He hated him because the town ran after him—he hated him for every guinea in a salary that had swollen with each new success: hated him because Godwin was sober while he was a drunkard—because Godwin was a genius and he was not. And now, for the first time in four years, he had his rival at his mercy, and the tooth that had been secreting venom could bite.

"If that's a fact, I'm sorry for you," he said slowly. "Yes—though you've never been civil to me I'm sorry you've married a——"

Godwin had walked across the room quickly after his first exclamation, and the two men were near each other, face to face, Campion's angry pallor visible under the thick coat of rouge, and his eyes glittering. The foul word on his lips remained half-spoken; for with one backward step from the mocking face Godwin brought his open hand upon the actor's lips, and a spurt of blood finished the sentence.

"You have seen, gentlemen. You have seen him strike me."

Campion's wife shrieked, and rushed to her husband.

"Coward!" she screamed, glaring at Godwin, "coward! He spoke in kindness, but he shall have the law of you."

"I am ready to answer for what I have done, madam, in the police court, or in another place, as Mr. Campion may decide," Godwin answered quietly, and then, looking about him, "If I have any friend in this room, I will ask him to stand by me."

Most of the actors were clustered round Campion, whose wife was wiping his lips with her handkerchief, and crying over him as if he had been mortally wounded; but Tilbury was sitting in the background looking on as calmly as if at a scene in an old play. He came forward at Godwin's appeal.

"I'm at your service," he said. "If Campion wants to fight you, he can't keep too quiet about it; but perhaps he'd rather summon you for assault and battery."

Campion felt that whatever shred of reputation remained to him in the theatre was at stake. To air his wrongs in a police court at a time when no man thought himself a gentleman if he submitted to so much as an insulting word without trying to kill the man who spoke the word, would be to invite contempt and ridicule. His fevered blood was on fire for instant revenge; and for the moment he felt as brave as a lion.

A stage carpenter and two or three underlings were looking in at the open door, attracted by the sound of angry voices.

Godwin and Tilbury whispered together in a corner for five minutes, till the call-boy shouted "Beginners," and the two



gravediggers hurried out of the room. The curtain was going up. Godwin followed them to the wings, while Campion left the green-room three minutes later with Stephen Barry, Mrs. Campion close at their heels. They retired into the darkness of the scene-dock, and there the frightened wife hung upon her husband's arm, imploring him to be calm, to remember that he had a wife and family, and to appeal to the law rather than risk his precious life in a duel with that wicked young man.

There was not much time for argument—they could hear the gravediggers talking, and then would come the scene with Hamlet and Horatio, and that done they must all be on the stage—Queen, King, Laertes.

"Let go my arm, Betsey, and don't make a fool of yourself," Campion said angrily. "I dare do all that may become a man. There's Hamlet's entrance, and the usual round. 'What fools these mortals be.' Tilbury dresses in your room, Steve, and you and he can settle everything. I mean to fight him. It's not the first time he has insulted me; but till to-night it has been words, words, words, not worth my notice. To-night he has given me my chance," this to Stephen Barry in an undertone that the frightened wife could not hear.

Funeral music warned the actors that it was time to take their places for the solemn entrance to the churchyard. Mr. Barry strutted majestically, with something of the Kemble walk, after Ophelia's coffin. Mrs. Campion followed her husband in a most unqueenly condition, while Campion, having washed his face in a hand-basin brought him by the call-boy, felt himself every inch a king.

The experienced actor can play his part under the most adverse conditions, and the play ended without a hitch. Indeed, in the midst of his excitement, Mr. Campion felt some satisfaction in the idea that he had never in his life acted better than in those last scenes. Mrs. Campion, on the other hand, was troublesome, spoke wrong words, or right words at the wrong time, and clutched her husband in a manner unseemly in Denmark's Queen—so much so that she nearly pushed him off the steps of his throne. But the green curtain—the death of each day's life—came down at last, and the actors went to their rooms in silence.

Mr. Tilbury lived in Queen's Buildings, three doors from the house which had been Godwin's first shelter in the great city; and it was here that he and Godwin sat at a table in a first-floor parlour when the church clocks were striking twelve. James Tilbury

was a bachelor, and had nobody to find fault with him for bringing a brother actor home at an unseasonable hour. The room was comfortable in a humble way, with curtains drawn, a good fire, and a pair of candles in brass candlesticks. There was supper on a side-table, but Godwin would take nothing, and was engaged in writing a letter while his host supped. The letter was to Sarah Merritt.

“ My dear Mother,

“ There has been an accident at the theatre by which I am likely to be detained all this night; but I am not hurt, and neither you nor Fanny need be uneasy about me. I know you will assure her of this, and do all you can to keep her calm and happy, till I am able to come home, which I hope I may be before nine o'clock to-morrow morning. I am with a good friend, and the only thing that troubles me is the fear that you and my wife may suffer anxiety on account of my absence, which is caused by a matter of business that I cannot more fully explain till we meet.

“ Your affectionate son,

“ GEORGE.”

There was an enclosure for Fanny.

“ Dearest,

“ Do not be offended or unhappy. The cause of my absence is unavoidable. Nothing but stern necessity would have kept me from our home to-night. Believe in my affection, and in my fidelity.

“ Your husband,

“ G. G.”

“ Fidelity.” He paused, looking at the word for some moments before he folded the letter. Yes, that was the word. He had married this woman, and he must be faithful to her. That vague sense of a burden laid upon him had grown stronger since the scene with Campion.

It was essential that he should pursue this quarrel to a sanguinary conclusion. To palter with the situation would be fatal. His honour, his peace of mind, hung upon the issue. He must make an example of this first slanderer, or his wife would never be safe from insult. He told himself that the man was a liar; and that it was enmity to himself that had prompted the lie: but such lies must be drowned in blood.

He sealed the sheet that held the two letters, and Tilbury took it downstairs, to find a messenger, who was to be paid a crown for delivering it at number eleven, Bedford Square. He was to ask for Mrs. Merritt, and to give the letter into her hand, but he was not to say from what place he had come.

This being done there came the question of weapons. The challenge had come from Campion, and Godwin had the right of choice.

"I know you are good with the foils," Tilbury said. "I suppose you will be for swords."

"Old-fashioned and theatrical. Let it be pistols, and at day-break. I want the thing finished as soon as possible."

"Have you ever fired a pistol—off the stage, a pistol with a bullet in it?"

"Angelo and I are friends. I have been a frequent visitor at his rooms ever since I came to London, and last winter he took it into his head that I must learn to shoot, and he used to take me into his yard after our small-sword practice and make me shoot at a mark. He is the kind of man who wants things done well; and I had to hit the centre pip in the five of spades at thirty paces before he was satisfied."

"Then you may take your chance. Campion won't try to kill you, for his own sake: but he won't fire in the air. And I don't suppose you will."

"No."

The door-bell rang as he spoke.

"That's Barry. He said he'd come round after supper. You want the meeting to come off in the morning?"

"I do. It is light at half-past seven—I want the business over and done with."

"How about pistols?"

"Mine are in my bedroom—and after the letter I have just sent, I can't go home to fetch them. I couldn't in any case have done so. You and Barry must find the pistols, if you have to ring up a gunmaker on our way to the meeting."

This was said on the stairs as the two men went down. Tilbury to open the street door, and Godwin to leave the coast clear for the interview with Barry.

He told his friend that he would be back in an hour, and passed Barry with a friendly nod, on his way to the open air.

Barry and he had always been on friendly terms. Barry was young and handsome, a good actor of the conventional

school, and a favourite with the audience. He had seen the new man's success with astonishment, but without rancour.

It was a relief to Godwin to find himself under the stars, with a keen east wind blowing in his face.

He went straight to the roadway in front of the grave old house where his wife of a day was waiting for him. He heard his dog bark as he walked past the door. The first short bark was followed by excited barking, and he thought Hector had recognised his master's footfall. He crossed the road quickly, and stood with his back to the railings, looking at his house. Not to take Hector to the theatre with him was an unusual thing, but to-night his dog had been forgotten when he was leaving the house: and now, standing opposite the door behind which he heard a low, plaintive whining, he thought of that faithful companion with unspeakable love.

Would he ever see his dog again? Would he ever enter that house again, conscious of life, with the light foot of youth and hope?

He looked up at the windows. The curtains were only half-drawn in that large room on the second floor, where he had talked of seeing ghostly reflections in the polished mahogany—the room where he and Hector had been companions—but where a wife was now to be mistress of the scene. The room was lighted only by the glow of the fire. Wife and mother were waiting for him in the library, where he was to have supped with them gaily two hours ago.

He thought of them both with tenderness. He was spared anxiety on one material point. He had made his will the day before—a holograph will on a single page of letter-paper, and he had signed it in the vestry after his marriage, with the verger and the pew-opener for witnesses. The annuity which he had bought for Sarah Merritt after his first season in Dublin would have made her secure of a comfortable old age; but he had left all he possessed in equal moieties to his wife and his adopted mother. The only subtraction from his estate was a legacy of a hundred guineas, his books, and the furniture of his library, to Patrick O'Brien.

He could afford to look death in the face. Champion would hardly want to kill him; but some trick of fate might make his opponent's shot mortal.

He walked about the Square, or loitered in front of his house, for more than an hour, and then hurried back to Queen's Buildings. The familiar aspect of the paved court, and the old Dutch-

looking houses, took his thoughts back to the fever of rage or of hope that had burnt within him as he paced those stones four years ago, penniless, poorly clad, half famished, to the aching hours of a dull despair—the fierce moments in which he had challenged Destiny, swearing that he *would* succeed. And now he had won fame and fortune, and held them, for his reputation was still growing, his income had swollen year by year. He was the fashionable actor, the actor whose name was synonymous with the Shakespearian drama, the man who had raised the status of the stage-player, who had elevated acting to a fine art.

He had won all; and he was going to risk all, for a woman's good name. He paced the court slowly, thinking of his wife, or rather thinking of that Fanny Fountain he had known when he was new to Drury Lane, and when she was nothing to him away from the footlights.

The woman who had thrown herself into his arms—the woman who had appealed to his finest feelings, his love for all helpless things, his tenderness and compassion, was not the same woman as the frivolous Miss Fountain, whose beauty he had seen with an indifferent eye, and of whose talent he had thought badly. He had thought of her only as a pretty woman, with a shallow brain and a fascinating manner—and now he was thinking of the other woman who had bared her passionate heart before him, and whose exquisite form had lain in his arms in the abandonment of reckless love. She had asked no questions, she had made no bargain with him, she was in his arms, she was at his feet, his “*odalisque*”: but all that might have warned and repelled a colder nature had appealed to his heart, and made him her champion and defender.

And now, pacing those familiar stones in the cold night wind, there came back upon him the memory of a day when out of pure chivalry and good feeling he had taken upon himself to defend the woman who was now his wife.

It was in the green-room one December morning, near the end of the season, when Miss Fountain was allowing herself to be admired in a black satin pelisse trimmed with sable, which set off her pink-and-white prettiness. All the women had praised the costly fur; but she had scarcely left the room when malice showed itself in more than one speaker. The price of the sables and the amount of the lady's salary were compared with sneers, and with a covert allusion to a royal profligate—whose name had once been linked with hers.

Godwin sat by the fire with Hector at his feet, apparently



absorbed in the book of the play which was being rehearsed, but losing no word of the conversation, indignant at the petty malice of minor actresses, more especially as the unkindest things were being said by Mrs. Campion, who was Fanny's particular friend.

The prompter looked in at the door.

"Ladies, are you aware that you are all on in the third act? Do you want to keep us here till five o'clock?" Whereupon there was a general scamper towards the stage.

Mrs. Campion, not being wanted, went calmly on with her knitting.

Godwin remembered her sullen look when he rose, and stood with his back to the fireplace, looking down at her.

And then he had challenged her as Fanny Fountain's friend. He asked her why she said things which she must know were unjustified by fact. In his disgust at the pettiness of the speeches he had been hearing, he was outspoken almost to brutality. What right had anyone to speak ill of Miss Fountain? The Prince of Wales had admired her, and his admiration, publicly expressed, had helped to make her the fashion. But had she ever been his mistress? Was there any act in her life that could justify the innuendoes he had just heard from a woman who professed to be her friend? He pushed the question to the farthest limit, and Mrs. Campion denied that she had ever thought ill of her dear Fanny. She knew her too well, and knew that the talk about His Royal Highness had been without foundation. She would answer for Fanny's character. Feather-headed, extravagant, vain?—yes; but unchaste?—no.

That was the only question he had ever asked about Fanny Fountain till the day when he had tried to look through her eyes to the soul behind them, and had demanded the answer that was to decide his Fate.

He recalled Mrs. Campion's speech and manner, her countenance, at first confused and frightened at his sudden attack—then resolute. He believed that she had told him the truth.

"You have been nearly two hours," Tilbury said, as he opened the door. "You might have come back sooner. I want to turn in for an hour or two before we start. I've kept up the fire—and you can be pretty comfortable upon the sofa with a pillow and a blanket. We've settled everything. The meeting is to be at seven o'clock sharp, in a field at Islington, behind Colebrook Square. Barry will bring Dr. Fenwick, who doctors half the company gratis, and would do anything to oblige you."

" Yes, I know Fenwick. He doctored Hector for me two years ago when my dog got his eye hurt in a fight with Harvey's bull-terrier."

" That's Fenwick all over ! He'd do anything for a dog or an actor."

" An amiable weakness. How about the pistols ? "

" Barry will bring them. He's been out himself, and is proud of it. I'm going to lie down—and you'd better do the same. Two o'clock ! I'll be up at five to make some coffee. We must have a bit of breakfast before we start ; a hackney coach will take us to the place in half an hour ; but we shall want time to spare for accidents."

" It might be difficult to get a coach so early."

" Not likely. It'll be about the time when the bloods are going home, and the jarveys will be on the look-out for fares."

The night wore on in the panelled room where Godwin had garnered his treasures of prose and poetry : the mighty masters whom Patrick O'Brien had taught him to love, in those childish days when Shakespeare and the Bible were all he knew of literature.

It was a grave old room, the oak wainscot alternating with blocks of books that were soberly and even shabbily bound, just as Godwin had brought them home, after a hunt among the second-hand booksellers. Old editions of the old playwrights—the Elizabethans that Charles Lamb loved—Milton, Dryden, Pope, and a long range of octavos in brown calf. It was not a library to please a woman's eye, or awaken a woman's interest ; and yet Godwin's sanctum in the firelight was not without a certain homely charm. The fine old eight-day clock with a brass face, the crimson curtains, and rich Turkey carpet, and the portrait of Shakespeare over the mantelpiece, made a pleasant ensemble.

The night wore on. The old clock chimed the hour. Four o'clock, and Fanny was still sleeping. Sarah Merritt had moved her to the sofa, lifting the slender form in her strong arms, and had pillowed the fair head luxuriously. She had kept up a good fire without making any noise in the process, and she had sat sleepless, listening to every sound in the street, anxious and full of wonder.

Again and again she read Godwin's letter, but it could tell her nothing. An accident at the theatre ? What accident ? And why should it keep her son from home on his wedding night ?

Had there been a fire—like that of a few years ago? Surely not. Even in Bedford Square there must have been some sound of the uproar such an event would cause. She crept out of the room several times as the slow hours went by, and opened the hall door, and peered into the darkness, and stood and listened for distant noises, and heard nothing but an old watchman's sleepy voice calling the hour. It was a weary length of time in which to listen and wait, with a heart agonised by shapeless fears. Happy for the wife that she could sleep, while the mother watched.

It was not till after the late daylight that Sarah fell asleep, in the comforting warmth of the fire, and the silence of curtained windows that shut out the sounds of an awaking world.

She had not slept more than half an hour, though her slumber was so deep that it seemed long, when she and Fanny were awakened by a loud knocking and ringing, while the dog ran to the door barking violently.

The two women rushed into the hall, and Sarah opened the door with trembling hands, scared by that loud summons, before any servant could appear. Godwin was being lifted out of a hackney coach, and carried up the steps, in the arms of two men.

He was unconscious—his limbs were hanging loose, his head was supported by Dr. Fenwick's shoulder, the eyes closed, the face colourless.

Fanny shrieked as James Tilbury and the doctor carried their burden through the hall, with the terrier at their heels, biting their legs in a frenzy, as the enemies of an idolised master.

"For God's sake keep that cur off us," cried Tilbury, "or I shan't have an inch of my leg left by the time we get this poor fellow upstairs."

Here the doctor interposed. His patient was losing blood, and was not to be carried farther than was absolutely necessary. Was there a sofa anywhere on the ground floor?

Sarah opened the door of the library. Yes, there was a sofa, and a fire—everything comfortable.

"God of mercy, is he dead?" Fanny asked distractedly. Fenwick was known to her as a familiar figure behind the scenes.

"No, not dead, nor dying; but seriously hurt. He'll come to himself presently. He fainted from pain when we moved him out of the coach."

"Will he die?"

"Not if he is taken care of. No vital organ is touched—and I don't mean your son to die, ma'am"—this to Sarah. "We can't spare the finest actor in London."

The prostrate figure was carried into the room, and the door was closed upon the two women for nearly an hour; and then, one by one, wife and mother were allowed to go in, and sit by Godwin's side for a few tearful minutes, while the doctor stood on the watch.

He had recovered from his fainting fit, and was able to greet his wife with a pale smile, and to lay a feeble hand in hers, which trembled more than his own.

"Don't be unhappy, dear. Fenwick says I am not to talk—nor to have the company of those I love—but just to lie like a log, and let him cure me. You and mother have nothing to do but be hopeful and happy. I am not going to leave you."

His wife had no answer but a rain of tears. She was on her knees by the sofa, covering the pale hand with passionate kisses.

"Come, come," said the doctor. "Do you call this good behaviour?"

Hector was lying by his master, and growling at his master's wife with an obvious intention of using his teeth.

"That cur has no business here, Godwin. You'd better let me take him away," said Fenwick.

"You shan't be my doctor if you call my dog a cur. I thought you liked Hector."

"Of course I like the brute. He and I are old friends. Come, Mrs. Godwin, you've had more than five minutes."

He picked up the kneeling figure with dexterous hands, and took her out of the room as if she had been a piece of furniture. He was not going to allow sentiment or hysterics to retard his patient's recovery. He had done all that was necessary for the time being, and he had sent Mr. Tilbury to Great Queen Street with an urgent line to Sir Humphrey Hadlow, the famous surgeon, telling him what had happened that morning. He knew that he could count upon the great man's instant attention.

The surgeon's carriage was at the door half an hour later, and before evening the bullet had been removed. Godwin was sleeping under the influence of a narcotic, while one of Sir Humphrey's dressers was installed as nurse. No one was to see the patient, and all possible measures were to be taken to maintain silence in the house.

"His dog is allowed to be with him, but not his wife," Fanny moaned, when Sir Humphrey had given his instructions.

"Because a dog is an inferior animal, madam, without the gift of speech. Fenwick tells me the terrier is a sensible beast, who has become almost human in companionship with his master; and as the patient wants him to lie at his feet, I think he had better be indulged."

"He does not want me," Fanny sighed.

"In a few days' time he will tell a different story," the surgeon said, smiling at her, "and will hardly let you out of his sight."

She was freshly dressed in her puce silk gown, her hair coiled high in a Spanish comb. It had been a pleasure for Sarah to assist at her toilet, and to exercise arts long unused.

"I was once a dab at hair-dressing," she told Fanny, and Fanny complimented her upon her skill, and showed a friendly readiness to take advantage of her capability in that and in all other details of a careful toilet.

Before night everybody in London knew that the great tragedian had been wounded in a duel with that very inferior artist, Campion, the stock heavy-man at Drury Lane. In clubs, at dinner parties, and all over London, the duel was being discussed.

Nobody had talked, nobody in the theatre or out of it would have owned to having uttered a word about this delicate business; and yet everybody knew all that had happened—the quarrel in the green-room, the meeting in the meadow behind Colebrook Square, Godwin's marriage in the quiet City church, the perilous operation performed by Sir Humphrey Hadlow, who had removed the bullet from a deep-seated wound, and the attendance of Sir David Tranby, the Court physician, who had been sent by his royal master.

Straw lay thick upon the roadway on the east side of Bedford Square, the knocker had been removed, and a placard on the door gave the last report of the patient's condition.

"The Castle Spectre" had been substituted for "Hamlet," and the theatre had been half empty, though the doors and box-office were besieged by people who wanted to know what had happened to their favourite actor.

"All this fuss about that young man, and not a single inquiry at our lodgings, though my poor James is lying in agony, and may never be able to use his left arm again," said Mrs. Campion, more bitter than ever in her grief for her husband. "At the best it will be months before he can act—and there was no Sir Humphrey to set his bones, and no Court physician to feel his



pulse—only a young surgeon from St. Bartholomew's, and the shabby old apothecary in Catherine Street, who came out of friendship for my poor Jim."

"Your poor Jim aimed at Godwin's heart, and would have killed him if the bullet had gone half an inch to the right," said Barry, who had been disgusted at the behaviour of his principal.

## CHAPTER XVIII

GODWIN'S convalescence was rapid. Everything was in his favour. His youth, his sinewy frame, unburdened by superfluous flesh ; his muscles of iron and nerves of steel ; and, above all, his will to live. He projected his thoughts into the future. He had not finished his course. He could not say with Charles Lamb, *opus operatum est*. He had new worlds to conquer. Jaffier—Zanga—Marlowe's "Faustus"—and those dark and dreadful forms that people the earlier Elizabethan drama—they were all about his bed in the long winter nights, terrible images, shadows that moved and lived in his feverish dreams. And then there were those bright beings, the gracious figures that sparkle with airy life in the world of comedy. Benedick, Mercutio, Malvolio, Charles Surface, young Marlow, Jack Absolute, Don Felix. London knew Godwin only as a tragedian—but the experience of his prentice days had proved his power in comedy ; and in the watches of the night it was pleasant to imagine new triumphs, lighter victories, supremacy in a gayer world ; laughter instead of tears.

Surgeon and physician were delighted at the rapid recovery. Critics and gossips sprinkled paragraphs about the actor in the midst of particulars of the French Emperor's last victory or defeat. It was a period in which the drama occupied a large place in the public mind, and most of all in the world of fashion, where private theatricals were the rage, and where the great people who filled the boxes at the patent theatres were often studying their favourite actors or actresses in the hope of excelling them in their art.

That time of convalescence was a dream of quiet happiness for Sarah Merritt, and of a somewhat fitful joy for Godwin's wife.

There were no trained hospital nurses in those days, no nice-looking young women in print gowns and white aprons and smart white caps to come into a house and take possession of a patient, with power to shut the door upon his nearest and dearest. Sir Humphrey's dresser took charge of the wound, and Godwin's valet waited upon his master, but the two nurses who would have

kept watch and ward over the patient in these days were represented by his mother and his wife : Fanny, restless and tearful, affectionate and incapable, always eager to do something, and never knowing what ought to be done—moving his pillows as he was dropping off to sleep, or heaping coals on the fire when the heat of the room was oppressive ; Sarah Merritt, quiet and efficient, seeming to know things by instinct. During those weeks of convalescence, perhaps the most vital part of Sarah's nursing was to prevent the other nurse doing harm.

For Fanny the seclusion of the invalid's room was paradise. She had absolute possession of the man she loved. And he was exquisite in his tenderness and his gratitude for her devotion.

" A dismal honeymoon for my poor girl," he said, smiling at her as she bent over his pillow.

" Dismal ! To be with you ! Do you think there is any earthly paradise in which I should be half as happy as I am in this dear old room, where I have you all to myself—no horrid visitors : no one but your good old mother, and the prosy old doctors ? "

" I never call my mother old. I never like to remember that she is not as young as in our struggling days, when she had as much life and energy as if she had been five-and-twenty."

" Oh, well," said Fanny apologetically, " no doubt she is a wonderful woman ; but she is getting on."

" Getting on ! How I hate the expression. We are all travelling on the same road. You and I will be ' getting on ' before we know that youth has gone. Apropos of visitors, we are to have one to-morrow ; but a visitor I know you will like."

" I shan't like anybody who comes to spoil my honeymoon. Who is it ? "

" The lady my mother calls my duchess."

" The Duchess of Pentland ! Your devoted admirer ! Your mother has told me how she spoils you. She won't like me. She'll be jealous of me, nasty old woman ! If she gives herself airs, I shall let her see that I can take my own part, and am not to be trampled on by the greatest lady in the land."

" She won't trample on you. She is the most gracious of women, and you will find her a kind friend."

" And I shall want friends, now I am your wife. All those women at the theatre will hate me. I shall have to face envy and malice on every side." And then, with sudden passion, and a rush of tears, she fell on her knees by Godwin's sofa.

" Oh, I know, I know," she sobbed, " though you are too generous to tell me. It was for me you fought ; it was for me

you risked your life. I might have awakened that dreadful morning to find myself a widow—your widow who had never been your wife. It was for me you fought. *You* can have no enemies.”

“No enemies? My dear girl—did you ever hear of a successful man—from the Archbishop in his palace to the cobbler in his stall—who was without enemies? I have lived in an atmosphere of malevolence. What right had I, the strolling player, to come among them in my seedy coat and patched boots, and save the fortunes of the theatre? The thing was ridiculous—not to be tolerated. *Campion* has been twenty years on the London stage, believing himself a genius all the time, and the public has never accepted him at his own estimate. I was over-excited that night, after our wedding-dinner, and I resented a sneering speech that I might not have noticed at any other time. It was just as well to give him a lesson.”

“And he tried to kill you. *Tilbury* told me he did. No, no, *George*, you wouldn’t have struck him for an ill-natured speech on your wedding-night. He said some cruel thing about me—your wife of a day; and it was for me you fought. Oh, why, why did you marry me? Why didn’t you leave me in the dust at your feet, loving you, and happy with a kind word, with a kiss? I always adored you, but I never hoped to be your wife. You ought not to have married me.”

*Godwin* lifted himself up among his pillows, resting on his right hand, and looked at her with a look that sent the colour from her cheeks.

“Was it the truth that you told me on your oath, that day in *Hertford Street*?”

“Do you think I could tell you a lie?”

Her lips were trembling, but she looked him in the face, with eyes that met his boldly.

“Was it the truth—so help you *God*?”

“It was the truth—so help me *God*.”

“Then I would risk my life twenty times for my wife—if it were needed. No man shall live to cast a slur upon the woman I have sworn to cherish.”

She did not hear him. Her eyes were closed; the slender form swayed like a sapling in the wind, and the next moment she was lying on the floor by his sofa.

He felt that he had been cruel. He had no right to make her repeat that solemn assurance she had given him while they were both free. He pulled the bell-rope that hung within his reach, and his mother came to the rescue, with hartshorn and smelling-salts,

while the terrier stood beside his fainting mistress, barking furiously. They were friends now, wife and dog.

The passionate scene between husband and wife was followed by a night of fever and delirium, and retarded Godwin's recovery. The Court physician was disconcerted, and Sir Humphrey Hadlow was angry. His patient must have been imprudent, or his womenkind must have troubled him.

"That silly wife of his makes too much fuss. She is desperately fond of him, but her fussing is bad for his nerves," said Sir Humphrey.

"These violent delights have violent ends," quoted the physician. "I saw something of Miss Fountain ten years ago. She was pretty much the same as she is now. Sweet simplicity, with a tendency to hysteria. I don't think she is the best kind of wife for Godwin. A great actor should have a calmer bosom to rest upon."

The lengthening days went by with little change in the large room on the second floor, Fanny's luxurious boudoir, where her husband spent the latter part of his convalescence: a cheerful room with windows that commanded the gardens of Montagu House.

"One could fancy oneself quite in the country," Sarah Merritt said, as she looked out of the window. Indeed, there were still wide spaces and open country between Gower Street and Hampstead. The villages and lanes north of Islington and east of Whitechapel were still the rural places Charles Lamb loved. London was not so fine a city as it is now—but the country, with all the delight of green pastures and shady lanes, was much nearer.

No visitors had yet been admitted, but cards of inquiry rained into the hall, where the country-bred maids were astounded at the magnificence of London footmen. Great gentlemen came to the door to ask for the latest news of their favourite actor, and great ladies sent flowers, "With kindest compliments, for Hamlet," "for Richard," "for Shylock," until the room looked like a *chapelle ardente*—flowers of the costliest in April, when the South of France was distant by more than a week's journey.

"They do make a fuss about you," Fanny said, with a faint touch of jealousy. It seemed to her somehow that the fuss ought to have been about her. So far, her rôle of wife had been a poor thing—a secondary character, a mere walking-lady, when she wanted always to play the heroine.



While the hands on the dial were moving slowly in that quiet room, the world outside was full of torment and turmoil. The good old King was wandering, broken-hearted and demented, in his palace of Windsor, or in the homely rooms at Kew, sorrowing for the loss of an idolised daughter, whose death-bed confession had told him that she, even she, had deceived him, and had made a secret marriage that must to his stubborn pride have seemed disgraceful. An eldest son, hated by his mother, and estranged from his father, hungry for power, deep in debt, ruined by a boundless and besotted extravagance, and longing for the sound of the Cathedral bell that should tell the passing of a king. War abroad, and the fear of invasion at home—invasion that was talked of as something that might happen to-morrow. Patriotic fire burning low in the House of Commons, and England's invincible Captain mistrusted and slandered, his victories belittled, his gazette received with doubt and accused of exaggeration. An incapable Ministry, an Opposition panting for the catastrophe that would raise their royal Chief to unlimited power.

To be "Regent without restrictions"—that was what the Prince of Wales was longing for. To be King in all but the name of King. To dip his hands into the nation's treasury, and pour the nation's gold into the bottomless pit of Carlton House—that palace of bad art whereof the building and furnishing, the gold and silver plate, the glass and china, had been more costly than battleships to defend Egypt, or soldiers to fight under Wellington.

The great lights had gone out. Pitt was dead, crushed by the battle of Austerlitz, which had destroyed England's chief ally. His splendid rival had not long survived him. Fox, the brilliant, the urbane, the irresistible, would play no more ruinous rubbers, drink no more into the deep of night. Never again would the House sit enthralled—first by two hours of magnificent rhetoric by Pitt, and then by the rejoinder of Fox, who took three hours to traverse what Pitt had said in two, with language as eloquent and logic as convincing. Two great lights were extinct. Canning was still there, with his trenchant wit, and uncompromising power; and that bold young genius, Henry Brougham, hungry for success, and unfettered by principle; Sheridan, the most brilliant of the Prince's gang, on tiptoe for the triumph of his party, when the Prince should grasp the power that had so long eluded him, and should be "Regent without restrictions."

The day came at last, towards the end of April, when Godwin was allowed to talk about his return to the stage.

Harvey waited upon him, friendly and obsequious, and the date of his reappearance was discussed. The physician had seen his patient that morning; and had pronounced that if there were no further set-back, he might begin rehearsing as soon as he liked; but he was not to act till the second week in May.

His spirits rose as the manager opened his notebook, and told him all that had been happening while he lay ill, and of all that had been talked about for the future. Never had Harvey seemed to him so agreeable a person. Even to talk of the theatre was rapture. There had been a revival of the "Cataract of the Ganges"; but that thrilling drama had grown somewhat stale, and real water had ceased to attract.

It was decided that Godwin should make his reappearance as Benedick. There was a *débutante* from Plymouth, whom Harvey had seen, and declared to be a genius.

"She will be another Jordan. I saw her play Lady Teazle. The rogue has a graceful figure, a pair of dancing hazel eyes, and a delicious laugh. She has red hair, candid carrots; but in powder or a flaxen wig she is splendid."

"And she can act?"

"Better than any young actress in London—now that we have lost Miss Fountain," Harvey added in a lower voice, and with a conscious glance at Godwin, whose face clouded at a speech that recalled the manager's offence against Fanny.

"Miss Fountain will never act again," he said haughtily. "My wife must not be exposed to the vicissitudes of a theatre."

Perhaps it was only then that he remembered how badly Fanny had been treated by the stage-manager; but now the memory of that little scene in his dressing-room came back upon him. Her agitation, her tears, her appeal to him as her only friend. She had loved him, she would have fallen upon his breast and sobbed out her load of sorrow that night if he had been kinder—but he had not understood. He had been almost cruel for want of sympathy. He felt ashamed of having let her enemy come into the house; and he made short work of Harvey when the business of his reappearance was settled.

"The fellow never so much as offered me a glass of wine," Harvey told his subordinate. "Gad's life, when I remember Weymouth and the scarecrow that came to breakfast with me, the seedy scarecrow! There's not one in a thousand who would have seen the genius in that lanky starveling. I tell you, sir, I discovered Godwin, discovered him as Columbus discovered America. He might have gone on barn-storming, padding the

hoof from one crazy shed to another, till this day, if Josh Harvey were not a critic in a thousand. Think of the risk I ran when I engaged the fellow. And he hadn't manners enough to ring for a bottle of Madeira while I sat stewing over the cast of 'Much Ado' ! "

" Well, he went up like a rocket, and he'll come down——"

" No, he won't. He's been up too long. He's as much an institution as Lord Liverpool. Nothing will hurt him, if he doesn't take to drink, like Cooke, and chuck away his chances as that poor devil did."

## CHAPTER XIX

GODWIN'S duchess came that afternoon—a noble figure, with a face that was full of mind, white hair, and kind blue eyes. Fanny thought that she would never have taken this lady for anything less than a duchess, though she wore a plain cloth gown, and had only one ostrich feather in her satin bonnet.

Godwin received her at the top of the stairs, and brought her to his wife's room, where the perfume of cedar-logs burning on the hearth was mixed with the scent of hothouse roses. He had done with sofa and pillows now, and was wearing his everyday clothes.

"Oh, you foolish man!" said the Duchess. "You don't look half so much of a wreck as I expected to find you."

And then she held out her hand to his wife, with a look that was friendly, but grave.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Godwin, and I hope we shall be good friends. Your husband's genius has been the delight of a life that has known many sorrows, and has out-lived many joys, and I have come to think of him almost as I might if he were my adopted son. I hope you are going to make him happy."

"If I can make him happy by loving him, Duchess, there need be no fear of failure."

"Not if you will love him wisely—but, alas! how few of us can be wise where we love. To love and to be wise is scarcely given to the gods."

Her manner was kind. She stole critical glances at Fanny now and then, but took care not to seem severely observant.

He had taken her advice. He had forgotten that proud woman who would never have rewarded his love. She had told him he ought to marry; and she could not be angry with him for obeying her, even although the woman he had married was the last she would have chosen for him.

"She is pretty and graceful—and she is fond of him," she said to herself, looking from wife to husband, as they sat on

each side of the fireplace. "I suppose that is enough for the average man. But then George Godwin is not the average man."

The Duchess and Godwin talked for nearly an hour. They talked of the old Duke, his invalid state, his cheerful endurance; his keen interest in politics and literature, in all the choicest things of life. He was for war at whatever cost to the nation—he admired Arthur Wellesley, mistrusted the Whigs, and had a very poor opinion of the Prince and his brothers.

"But my dear old Duke agrees with me," concluded the Duchess, "that we ought to think of the Regent rather with pity than with blame, considering what a fine creature he might have been had his boyhood and youth been spent in happier circumstances. He has talents, and he is not quite without heart, though he sometimes does heartless things. He might have been the fine gentleman that his satellites call him—might have been, and is not. He was reared in a gloomy home, by narrow-minded parents, who kept him poor and in fetters, when they should have been teaching him how to use wealth and liberty. Perhaps he had his best chance when he married Mrs. Fitzherbert. She is a good woman—and she would have made him an honest man if he would have let her. She and I have been friends for many years—and I can never forgive the man whose lunatic ravings forced her into a marriage from which her good sense would have saved her, and repudiated her before the face of the world a few years after."

"And now I am told that Mrs. F. is at Carlton House," said Fanny, "giving herself regal airs, now that her husband is Regent."

"So far from that, she is living in seclusion, and only receiving her husband's most intimate friends," returned the Duchess. "I doubt if she will be at Carlton House long. The situation has become intolerable, and I believe she is only waiting for the chance of putting an end to it."

"You mean that there is a new favourite—the lady in the new house in the new square—an elderly houri."

"I see you are *au courant*. Let us talk of something more interesting," said the Duchess. "I want your husband to tell me of his latest achievements—before this foolish green-room quarrel. I had all the London papers—but I want to hear your own account of your new characters—or the characters that were new to London."

His own acting was a thing that Godwin could never be tempted to talk about, except with a brother actor, or with his *alter ego*,



Patrick O'Brien. But he could talk of other things—Byron, Wordsworth, whom he had met recently—that homely man who had divine thoughts.

"I sat next him at dinner," Godwin said. "It was a shock to see him eat; the man who knew the mystery of the soul's birth should not have had so hearty an appetite—nor have emptied his glass so conscientiously when the great people took wine with him. I heard him smack his lips after Lord Bayswater's Madeira."

"Godwin is a tremendous favourite at Bayswater House," said Fanny. "I hope you hate Lady Bayswater."

"Indeed I do not. She is a good woman *au fond*, though she can be odious when she has a mind to. Her insolence was put on a long time ago as a kind of armour, and has become natural to her, now that she no longer need play the porcupine."

"She is not received everywhere," said Fanny. "Not at Lady Guernsey's."

"Two such stars cannot shine in the same hemisphere."

Godwin had been brooding in silence, while his wife prattled, and now he addressed the Duchess abruptly, with a casual air: "What of your friend the Roman Princess? Have you heard of her lately?"

"I have no such friend, no Roman Princess. That marriage never came off. Lady Beaumont is in Scotland."

"Indeed? Why did she break with the Prince?"

"She heard too much about him from her Roman friends. No sensible woman would have married such a man—a gamester and a debauchee. Her brother wanted the marriage, to strengthen his position in the Vatican. The Prince is a nephew of the Cardinal who rules the Pope."

Godwin had an appointment at the theatre, or pretended suddenly to remember one. He started up from his chair—apologised to the Duchess, and urged her to stay and make friends with his wife. He was vexed that there had been so much talk about the Regent—and sorry that Fanny should be flippant, and eager to gossip about women of rank whom she knew only by hearsay.

And then came a pretty scene of connubial love, while Fanny brought her husband's coat, and helped him to put it on; the loose dark blue overcoat with satin lining and sable collar, in which Sir Thomas Lawrence had painted him. Godwin could hardly put it on without thinking of the ready-made overcoat that Sarah had bought at a cheap tailor's in York for the journey

to London. The dismal winter journey—the bitter pilgrimage to the Temple of Fame. He had known where it was leading him; and his spirits had never flagged—though the sleet stung his eyes, and the sky was dark. He had only felt the hardship for his mother's sake; and here she was, rosy and happy, in her silk gown and smart cap, coming to pay her respects to the Duchess, who shook hands with her, and said a few pleasant words—after which Mrs. Merritt curtsied and vanished.

Fanny's heart sank ever so little when she found herself alone with the great lady. The great people she had known in Hertford Street had been of the sex that could be treated with a masterful ease by a young woman conscious of her charms—free-spoken dandies who had complimented her upon her talents and her beauty in flowery language interlarded with oaths—and who had often been what they themselves called "sprung," when they were brought to her drawing-room after the play.

This lady, with the intelligent eyes and the thoughtful mouth, was different—and Fanny felt as if she were being put upon her defence. She thought Godwin had been cruel to leave her, and began to shrink from her visitor as from an unavowed enemy. Shy and ill at ease, she became loquacious.

"I hope you do not think Godwin has made a mistake in getting married—or that he ought to have married somebody else," she said.

"I know of nobody else he should have married—and he was wise to marry the woman he loves, without any ulterior consideration—I mean as to fortune."

Fanny began to cry. "I have not brought him a shilling. Of course he might have married an heiress. There are hundreds of women who would have snapped at him if he would have asked them. There is that rich widow who used to come to see him act night after night, and sit like a statue—not seeming to care twopence about the play or him. But neither she nor anyone else would have worshipped him as I do."

The grave eyes grew kinder.

"Go on worshipping him, my dear, but with wisdom. Study his welfare—make yourself one with him—love the things he loves—read the books he reads—learn to understand the great playwrights, from Shakespeare to Coleridge—as he understands them—comfort him when things are adverse—inspire him when his courage is low. The actor's life is a life of dreams—and there may come a time of disappointment, when the dream darkens.

It must be long before it can come to Godwin—but I hope if ever it does come, you will be there to keep the lamp of hope alight."

"You mean that he will grow old, and cease to draw full houses, or to earn a big salary," said Fanny, with a practical air.

"Age must come to the happiest of us—and I don't think your husband would like to live as long as Macklin, and totter on to the stage at ninety, to take his farewell."

And then the Duchess talked of lighter things—the house and the garden, Fanny's tastes and fancies.

"I see you have some exquisite furniture," she said, leaving her chair by the fire to look at a *secrétaire* at the other end of the room. "This is the prettiest thing I have seen for a long time—and indeed I see you have many lovely things. Wedding-gifts from your husband, no doubt?"

"No, Duchess. The furniture in this room was all mine before I married. It came out of my dear little house in Mayfair."

"In Mayfair!" The great lady's expressive eyebrows indicated surprise. "Well, that *secrétaire* is a gem—and the Vernis Martin table over there is almost as good; and your Indian screen is superb. I venture to criticise, as I am something of a collector myself. You must have spent a fortune on all these lovely things."

"I had no fortune to spend. I had only my salary—but that was a big one. We got things cheap. My aunt is clever. She kept house for me till I married, and she and I hunted the poky little second-hand shops."

"And found these gems? You were lucky, and your aunt must be a connoisseur of the first water. She must have what our neighbours call the *flair*. She ought to set up a curiosity shop in Bond Street. She would make her fortune in half a dozen years—if she were often as lucky as when she found that Louis Seize *secrétaire*—*cheap*."

Fanny heard the scornful emphasis on the last word. Her Grace of Pentland was not quite so easy to get on with as Godwin had described her. Thank Heaven he was not there to hear that scornful tone, and to see that incredulous smile. Fanny almost wished that she had let Susan Latimer buy her drawing-room furniture—although every object in the room was a souvenir of a friend who had forgotten her.

The Duchess's leave-taking was coldly polite; but as she drove away that fine lady felt a little ashamed of her remarks upon Mrs. Godwin's furniture.

“ I have not been behaving like a lady,” she thought, “ but, oh, how could Godwin marry that girl ? ”

The stories she had heard of Miss Fountain’s early successes—when Juliet’s name was coupled with a royal Romeo—had been coming back to her, as she sat in Fanny’s boudoir. She was at a loss to understand the motive of Godwin’s marriage ; but few women know how many marriages that turn out badly have been marriages of pity.

## CHAPTER XX

THE enthusiasm in the great theatre on Godwin's reappearance made the night memorable—one of those thrilling episodes in the history of the stage that old people talk about thirty years after the event. It was historic ; something to be written about and remembered, like the farewell of Mrs. Siddons, or the reception of Miss Foote after her victory as plaintiff in a famous trial for breach of promise. †

His performance of Benedick would have been a triumph in any case, for London had not seen Godwin in comedy till that night, and his comedy was a revelation. People are apt to forget that in art, as in most things, the greater includes the less, and are astonished that Gainsborough and Millais should excel as landscape painters, or David Garrick shine as Abel Dragger. The critics were unanimous in their approval of Godwin's Benedick, and only one or two of the cynical hinted that he was too good a comedian ever to have been good in tragedy. His Hamlet and Othello had been mere stage-trickery—rant rather than passion. As a comedian, he was natural and a genius.

Mr. Campion was in the cast. He had made his reappearance in the " Cataract of the Ganges," and had suffered some ill-usage from a few of Godwin's admirers in the pit : and now as Don John he was of no more account to the audience than a piece of stage furniture.

Fanny was in a box on that first night—beautiful in white satin and silver—but not looking happy. She had told Godwin that she hated the stage—but, sitting there to watch the play, it seemed to her that she only lived while she was an actress, and she hated Mr. Harvey's recent discovery, the new Beatrice, with a deadly hatred. This young lady—whose stage name was Vernon—had been educated in Paris, in a convent, and was said to be altogether superior to Susan Latimer and Fanny Fountain : a lady, born and bred, with a general, on half-pay, domiciled in Jersey, for her father. Susan Latimer was nodding to Fanny from a seat in the dress-circle ; and no doubt Susan hated the new actress almost as fiercely as Mrs. Godwin did. If looks



could kill, the *débutante* from Plymouth would have fallen dead at Benedick's feet, in the fourth act, when she was telling him to "kill Claudio," the scene when all that is alive and spirited in Shakespearian comedy was moving the house to a rapture of applause.

Godwin saw that something was wrong when he came to the cheerful old room where his wife and mother were waiting for him. Sarah had been in the upper boxes, the place she liked best, the place to which she had been free in all those shabby little country theatres where Godwin had been learning his art. She could go there in her bonnet. She could weep or laugh at her ease—and she could hear the people about her praise her son's acting.

Sarah came to meet him, and put her arms round his neck.

"You were just as good that night at Stamford, when they laughed at your legs," she said, "but, oh, the difference!"

He kissed her, and then turned to the wife who sat silent, looking at the fire.

"What, Fanny, not a word?" And then he sank into the chair opposite her. He was terribly exhausted. The excitement of the night had been tremendous. He had held a levee on the stage after the fall of the curtain. All the distinguished people among the audience had been there, and his physician had felt his pulse and watched his face while his friends were crowding about him, and had waited in his room while he dressed, to take him home in his own carriage.

"You were splendid," Fanny said. "I like you better in comedy than in tragedy. Yes, you were splendid, and you have never looked so handsome as in that magnificent costume."

"It was copied from the portrait of a Venetian Noble by Paul Veronese. Well, dear, I am glad you were pleased, and I hope you liked Beatrice."

This was fatal. Fanny had been keeping back her tears—tears of vexation, discontent, jealousy—but at the mention of Beatrice she sobbed aloud.

"Your Beatrice, Mr. Harvey's last goddess. Of course you think her beautiful!"

"Did not you?"

"I thought her hideous. She paints an inch thick, and those arched eyebrows of hers are like nothing human. Susan Latimer is plain, but at least she has a good figure; this one is all angles. But no doubt you think her lovely."

Sarah was carving a chicken, and tried to look as if she had no ears.

"Come, Fanny, don't be unkind. There can be no question of Miss Vernon's good looks—and she can act, which is better."

"Oh, you were over head and ears in love. Yes, I know," as he interrupted her with an angry exclamation, "stage-love—only stage-love—which means nothing; but when she was in your arms in the last scene it looked uncommonly real."

"I should be a wretched stick if it didn't—come, Fanny, you know what nonsense you are talking. Come to the table, and help me to eat a good supper. That ham mother is cutting might tempt an anchorite. Come, my dear, let us have no low spirits to-night. I hope you are glad that the play went well."

"Well? Why, you had an ovation—such applause must have made your brain reel."

"My head swam more than once, and I felt as if I should fall into the orchestra—but it was not gratified vanity that made me giddy."

"You are above such common feelings, but perhaps, if you were in my position, you would feel that it is a hard thing to find yourself nobody—forgotten and neglected—while a creature with not half your talent is filling your place. Do you suppose the audience did not wonder that I was not your Beatrice?"

She asked the question with angry eyes. She had pushed away her plate and risen from the table. In a flash Godwin saw the life that lay before him—a wife jealous of his success as an actor, and of every woman who acted with him.

"My dear," remonstrated Sarah, earnest and practical. "Let him eat his supper."

"Oh, I have done. Martha can clear the table," Godwin answered quickly. He drank a glass of Madeira and poured out a second. To eat was impossible in such circumstances.

He flung himself into the large arm-chair, and kept silence while the servant was in the room; he sat with bent shoulders, looking at the fire, with his dog between his knees.

"Fanny," he began, in the low, grave voice that had such music in it, "you told me you had done with the stage—that you hated the life and all belonging to it."

"That was true, when I told you so."

"You deceived me. I hoped that I was to have a wife, not a rival. A dear, domestic wife, who would be interested in the art I love, but would never want to share my successes or my failures—a being apart from the struggle and stress of my difficult pro-

fession. A wife who would make my home a place of rest and cheerfulness. I have seen too much bad blood between husband and wife who are rivals for praise and gain—who grudge each other the favour of the audience—the salary that each can earn. . . . Frankly, I would never have married an actress."

"And I ought not to have married an actor."

"So soon? Has love come to this already? Repentance—discontent?"

"How can I help being discontented—jealous if you like? How can I help it when all your thoughts are given to the theatre, and more than half your life will be spent there, now you are well?"

"But you knew about that beforehand, my dear."

"I knew—but I could not realise it. I want your love, George, your undivided love. Yes, I am jealous—I own it. How could I help being jealous, when I saw that creature in your arms?"

"Stage-love, foolish child," he said, smiling at her.

"Stage-love, of course. But you kissed her! The kiss was real."

She dried her tears and perched herself lightly on his knee. Their first quarrel was over. He kissed her oftener and more fondly than he had kissed Miss Vernon, who had been a mere lay figure in his arms, while his mind was full of Shakespeare's Beatrice, the ideal woman, lovely in her pride of youth and life, her gaiety of heart, her courage and resolution—"Kill Claudio!" She would not have minded killing him herself in her frenzy of pity for his ill-used bride.

Their first quarrel was at an end—but his vision of a peaceful home, where his wife would be as sympathetic and as proud of his success as his mother had been, was blotted out; and he saw care and difficulty in the future. He went out into the night when Fanny had gone to her room, and paced the Square in the bleak wind. He was not yet strong enough for one of his long rambles towards the open country on the north. But the slow walk in the Square calmed his spirits, and he was able to meditate quietly upon things that were not all pain. He heard the watchman call the quarter after two before he finished his walk under the windy sky, where a waning moon was losing herself amidst hurrying clouds.

## CHAPTER XXI

FANNY was gay and happy next morning, and full of talk. The twopenny postman was always waited for with a certain expectancy, and to-day he had brought her what she was pining for. She sat behind the bronze urn, gazing at a card of invitation, as if it had been the most remarkable thing she had ever seen.

The card was from the Duchess of Pentland. To meet H.R.H. the Princess Maria. Nine o'clock. Music.

But this was not all. Godwin had handed her a letter that made her glow with pride : short and to the point. It was from that Lady Bayswater of whom she had spoken disparagingly to the Duchess.

" Dear Godwin,

" I hear you have taken a wife. You have always been as self-contained as one of the Pharaohs in his pyramid, so I am scarcely surprised that you did not take the trouble to tell me about your marriage, though it was hardly civil to a friend of some years.

" Bring your wife to dinner next Sunday at half-past five. I have seen her act, and I thought her lovely on the stage, but I have never been in a room with her.

" I hope she is not going to be jealous of your friends.

' Yours, etc.,

" H. B."

" Will you accept her invitation ? " Godwin asked, not by any means pleased with the letter.

" Accept ! Of course I must accept. Bayswater House is lovely—and I don't mind the lady not being in society."

" I would not talk about that. Lady Bayswater has troops of friends."

" Not many of her own sex, I should suppose."

" As many as she wants, I believe. Don't go to her house, Fanny, if you think badly of her. She is an eccentric, with a

strong brain and a warm heart; and her husband is a great gentleman. I know no man more distinguished or more amiable."

"I hope it will be a big party, and that she will ask me very often in the season."

"Her hospitality is boundless."

It was Thursday, and there was no time for getting anything new for the dinner-party, and the white satin and silver that Fanny had worn at the theatre must be kept for the Duchess's concert. It was Godwin's latest present to his bride, as a reward for her having consented to forego what she called "a proper wedding-gown."

"I suppose my old blue gauze gown will do," she said.

"You are charming in blue," Godwin answered, without looking up.

He was reading Beaumont and Fletcher's "Noble Kinsmen," looking for traces of a greater hand.

"You don't care twopence," his wife exclaimed, and marched out of the room.

Nothing could have been more attractive than the blue gauze and blonde beauty when Mrs. Godwin appeared with her husband at Bayswater House. They were late, for Fanny was one of those people to whom punctuality is impossible. She had no measure of time, and had often kept the stage waiting—thereby incurring the wrath of actors and stage-manager—and as compared with the awfulness of Harvey's wrath, to be unpunctual at a dinner-party seemed of trivial importance. She laughed at Godwin for grumbling about it in the hired carriage that took them to Bayswater.

Her hostess frowned, and gave her two fingers.

"It is not like you to be a quarter of an hour behind time," the lady said to Godwin, with a significant glance at his wife.

"We are sorry," he murmured. "The roads were heavy, and the horses were slow."

"You should have allowed for that before you started. Well, you must all put up with a spoilt dinner. Benedick the married man is not so polite as Benedick the bachelor."

And having made everybody uncomfortable, Lady Bayswater told her husband to take Mrs. Godwin to the dining-room.

"It is her privilege as a bride," she said to the countess who had to follow, with a brilliant commoner.

Rank and ancient lineage were supposed to count for very little



at Bayswater House. Wit, genius, statesmanship, the making of history, were the things that counted. The learned professions, the senate, the world of art and letters, were in full force in that splendid old mansion : but for her superiors in the peerage the lady whom Lord Bayswater chose to honour had very little regard. Some of them had tried to snub her in the earlier part of her career, but she had a reserve force of insolence at her command that had made snubbing impossible, and she had a husband who repaid her for the sacrifice she had made for him by a devotion and a constancy in affection that are rare in the history of married life.

Lord Bayswater was kind to Fanny, and did his best to make her happy through the sumptuous dinner, so much too sumptuous, so much too long for modern taste. But Fanny was not at her ease. She was watching her husband, who sat between his hostess and the other great lady, and was talking with much animation. How they admired him, how they hung upon his words—laughed with him, or were serious with him, in the changefulness of moods that was one of his attractions. The society that was new to her had been long familiar to him. He knew everybody in the room, and everybody made much of him. He was their one great actor—just as the Duke of Wellington was their invincible soldier. Lawyers, churchmen, politicians, authors, and wits were many—but the hero of the Peninsular War, and the actor who had saved Drury Lane from bankruptcy stood alone.

Lord Bayswater found Godwin's wife a dull companion. She was distraught and uneasy, watching her husband when she ought to have been listening to his lordship, who gave her up as hopeless, and addressed himself to the man on his left, with whom he was soon absorbed in an animated conversation.

A good many people came in after dinner, and before ten o'clock the historical drawing-room was crowded. Among the men who came late there was an old acquaintance of Fanny's, the irresistible Sir Thomas Lawrence, the man of taste and of fashion, the man who had broken women's hearts.

He caught sight of Fanny sitting alone on a sofa, and went to her immediately, seating himself by her side, apparently charmed to find her there.

"I heard of your marriage," he said. "How did you put a hood over the wonderful eyes of that falcon, whom half the women in London have been trying to capture? Godwin or Byron—I hardly know which is first favourite."

"Where is Sir Thomas to be placed?" Fanny asked, smiling

at him. She had brightened at his coming. The familiar face and voice had brought a wave of self-satisfaction. Here was someone who had always admired her, and with whom she could chatter at her ease.

"Oh, he is not in the running. Middle age and serious ideas are creeping over me, Fanny, like blue mould on a picture. Oh, here's your husband." He rose to meet Godwin.

"I wanted to see you, Sir Thomas, and have been meaning to call upon you, at the risk of being a bore."

"Impossible! Come when you like, and I will show you my latest beauty, Miss Hildenbrough, the woman of the year. Come any day between two and four, and bring Mrs. Godwin. She is fond of pictures."

He called her Mrs. Godwin now, but her husband had heard and wondered at the familiar "Fanny."

"It will be a privilege to look at your new pictures; but there is an old one about which I have to ask a favour. I have the engraving of your portrait of my wife, painted, I think, in her eighteenth year, and I should very much like to possess the original, if it is still in your studio."

Fanny broke in hurriedly.

"Do you suppose Sir Thomas is ever allowed to keep a picture in his studio?" she asked.

"In any case, if this picture is still your property, I hope you will let me buy it," Godwin said.

"My dear Godwin, you have the lady, and you must be satisfied with that living beauty which no brushwork has ever equalled—not Titian's nor Raffaele's. We stand before the Fornarina, spellbound by the beauty of a perfect work of art; but if one were to turn suddenly and see the woman herself, as she lived when Raffaele painted her, where would be the picture? I am not going to say how long it is since I sold the original of that poor engraving—but it was before Miss Fanny Fountain's nineteenth birthday.

"You won't mind telling me the name of the purchaser?"

Sir Thomas looked thoughtful, tapped his forehead, and tried to remember.

"Hopeless," he said with a shrug. "I remember nothing, except that I got a handsome price for my picture, and would have been glad to paint so sweet a subject for no fee but the pleasure of watching her face as I painted her."

They had all three been standing in a little group among other groups, and were parted by an imperious dowager, who took

possession of the fashionable painter, while Godwin and his wife drifted to the door and made their departure.

It was Fanny's first appearance in society with her husband, and she went home dispirited and out of temper. She was of no consequence in that house where Godwin was a star. That painful fact had been borne in upon her; and she was sick with wounded self-love as she sat silent in the long drive home.

"I'm afraid you have one of your headaches," Godwin said gently, as he took her hand in his.

"Yes, my head throbs as if it would burst. Those rooms were terribly hot."

"But is it not an interesting house, and are not those rooms lovely?"

"I could see nothing—I was almost blind with my headache."

Godwin had been told about these headaches, which were a speciality. Fanny's headache, Fanny's cough, Fanny's low spirits, were all special maladies, peculiar to herself, and not sensible to medical treatment.

"Nobody has been able to cure *my* headache." . . . "Nothing ever does *my* cough any good."

Godwin had begun to accept this as something inevitable, that must be submitted to as a part of life.

Fanny's headache had run its course before the night of the Duchess's party, and Godwin was gratified by seeing his wife admired as one of the prettiest women in that crowded assembly. There were plenty of people to talk to Fanny there, younger men than Lord Bayswater, and with whom she was at once at her ease, sitting in a corner, and laughing and whispering behind her fan, in the intervals of the music. She was presented to the royal lady after supper, when the artists were standing in a semicircle about that exalted personage, basking in the light of her smiles. She had seen Miss Fountain act a year ago, and wanted to know why she was no longer acting.

"The young woman they have got for Beatrice is a fine actress, but you ought to have been Hero," said the gracious lady, a compliment which Fanny acknowledged with a profound curtsy and a forced smile. Hero, a secondary part, suggested for her, and that odious Miss Vernon praised!

The Princess did not observe the vexed expression. She had seen Godwin in a distant doorway, and was beckoning him

with her fan ; and again Fanny found that her husband was the star, and she herself an insignificant person, to whom great ladies were civil only on his account. In this crowd, however, she had plenty of men to praise her, and she was glad when the Duchess took her away from the circle round the Princess and gave her in charge of a sprig of fashion who was to take her to the supper-room, where royalty and the more exalted and elderly guests had been fed, and where the tables were ready for youth and gaiety.

Benedick the married man ! Godwin had been married a quarter of a year, and yet he looked back almost with wonder at the life when he was a bachelor, sole master of his days and hours, with no one who ever asked him why he did this or that, or left this or that undone. Sarah Merritt had been so completely in sympathy with him, that there had been no trivial curiosity, no shadow of distrust. But Fanny was full of questions and complaints. The midnight supper had been so cheery a meal when Sarah and her boy were together ; when he could sit with his elbows on the table, and expatiate upon the work of the evening, the effects that had succeeded or failed, speeches that had roused the house to enthusiasm, speeches that had missed fire. She knew every scene in the great plays, having sat through them night after night in those shabby provincial theatres, and watched her boy in the dim lights, against the worn-out scenery, before she saw him in the blaze of the vast London playhouse. She had perfect appreciation, perfect knowledge ; but with his wife it was different. Fanny never wanted to talk of the theatre, except to ask frivolous questions about the people in front of the house. She did not even pretend to be interested in the art for which her husband lived.

" I hate acting," she told him bluntly, " and I hate every actor I have ever known—except you. They are not even gentlemen. They don't know how to put on their clothes, or what clothes gentlemen wear. They don't know how to behave themselves among gentlemen—and I have never seen one that could fold a cravat properly. Oh, you are different, of course. Don't frown, mother. Your son is the black swan. He stands alone. Yes, dearest, you know how different you are from all those mummies ; and you know I adore you."

These little outbreaks of Fanny's had to be suffered with Godwin's grave smile. She loved him : that was what he had to remember. She was like the woman with her alabaster box of

ointment. She had given him the choicest thing she had. She had poured out her love at his feet. When she said she would be his odalisque, she had told him plainly how utterly she was his ; how reckless of all else in life but to win him.

Remembering this, her waywardness, her caprices, and small discontents, had to be excused. He must cherish her for all that was gentle and sweet in her nature ; and he must not ask for the sympathy and understanding that she was incapable of giving him. The art for which he lived had never appealed seriously to her. She had been intoxicated by the praise that had been lavished upon her for her girlish performance in Amateur Theatricals, when the best people in Falmouth had told her that she was a " born actress "—the compliments of rural squires and their sons, the boisterous applause of country bumpkins, given to her childish grace and prettiness, rather than to her acting, could she but have known the truth. She had gone on the stage as an escape from the humdrum life in her father's vicarage ; and her success in London had come too easily. Except for those early readings with Mrs. Siddons she had given neither thought nor trouble to her profession. She had neither sought help from professors nor laboured at self-improvement. The faults she had been told of by unfriendly critics in her first season were a little more pronounced when she had been ten years on the stage. The progress that other actresses made had never been achieved by Miss Fountain. To brood over the lines she had to speak, to realise their beauty and significance, had never been her way—nor had she ever striven to gain depth and volume for the light voice with which she had babbled her love for Romeo.

How could she sympathise with the man who had given seven years to strenuous work on and off the stage—who had roamed in solitary places, thinking out the character he was going to act, weighing the meaning of every line he was going to speak, sounding the depths of the poet's thought, and striving to make words live ? He had not been content to act Hamlet as other men had acted the part, moving carefully in the light of tradition, flattered to be told that in this or that passage, with this or that bit of stage-business, he had recalled Garrick or George Frederick Cooke. He had to create Hamlet, to give form and semblance to the Hamlet *he* knew. And so with every other character in his repertory. Each had been slow and laborious of birth ; but each stood alone in his imagination, a creature of fire and light.



How could Fanny sympathise with such an actor? All she felt was an offended sense that he was aloof from her—almost as much aloof as in those old days at the theatre when she had tried and failed to win him. She declared that she hated the stage; yet she fretted secretly because she was not acting.

She was jealous of the women who acted with her husband, which was bad; and she was jealous of her husband's success, which was worse. She was jealous of him on the stage and off. That first party at Bayswater House had shown her their relative values. He was the star. She was invited only out of civility to him. Nobody cared whether she was there or not. It had been better at the Duchess's concert, because there had been men she had known in the past, and she had been satisfied with their fine speeches. Yet, whatever compliments she received, she could see that her husband was the attraction. The women praised him to her, and asked her questions about him; his ideas, his habits and hours, when he rode, when he walked, what books he read—his favourite poet, even his dog. They hung upon her words, when she told them about Hector, and must have a description of the dog, and the dog's ways. Nothing could be too trivial. The least detail in the life of genius was thrilling. These women were all in love with him, she thought. Even the men were interested, and wanted to know by what means—by what long stages of study—he had garnered up the power with which he had burst upon the world at three-and-twenty. She was very tired of talking about him before the night was over. The Princess had been gracious to her after a fashion, but only as Godwin's wife. She would have made more fuss about his terrier. Everybody had spoken of Hector. He was a personage, and his name was known over London. There were no photographs to scatter the Scotch terrier's image over the world; but the dog had been immortalised in his master's portrait.

Fanny was hardly sorry that there were not more invitations, and that the dinners to which Godwin was bidden were men's dinners; and yet she could not help posing as a victim when her husband dined out. She had said she hated the stage; but after only two months of domestic life she began to droop. She had nothing to amuse her—nothing to think about. She was not fond of reading; and even a fashionable novel bored her, and was generally thrown aside before the second volume was finished. The Waverley novels were made impossible on account of the Scottish dialect. Jane Austen's stories were insufferable—dull pictures of humdrum lives. She was not fond

of needlework ; and she could not make herself happy with a dusting-brush and a chamois leather, as Mrs. Merritt could. She said that she had not been sent into the world to polish furniture, and she despised Sarah for her servile tastes. To rub the dining-table till she could see her face reflected on it as on a mirror, might amuse Sarah ; but it only made Fanny's arm ache. She was not fond of exercise ; and after walking to Primrose Hill once or twice with her husband she gave up all idea of being his companion. Such walks would kill her.

He saw that she was languid and spiritless.

" My poor child, what can I do to amuse you ? " he asked kindly.

The answer was embarrassing. She told him that she had been thinking seriously of their lives, and it seemed to her that she ought to go back to the stage, and to act with him. It was preposterous that she, his wife, she who had shared the triumph of his first appearance in London, who had acted the juvenile lead with him for four seasons, always with the public approval, should be sitting at home while another woman filled her place—an actress obviously inferior to her.

" I ought to be acting with you, Godwin. People must wonder why I am shelved, to make room for a sandy-haired maypole."

" The sandy-haired maypole is a fine actress. She has not your charm, my love—but she is a favourite with the audience, and she does very well. When you and I were merely comrades—little more than strangers—I could not have desired a more exquisite Ophelia—a lovelier Desdemona ; but now I could not act with you, Fanny."

" Why not ? "

" You are too near—you are a part of myself. You would be a distracting element. Every change of mood would unhinge me. You are emotional—and your emotions would no longer be a part of the play—they would no longer help the illusion—I should be thinking of my wife, when I ought to be thinking of Desdemona. You would not be Cordelia—but Fanny—Fanny looking vexed or unhappy—Fanny whose every shade of feeling must appeal to me. No, my dear, I shall never act with you."

Fanny burst into tears. He was horribly cruel. It was unheard of that an actor should not wish to act with his wife, should not prefer his wife to any other actress. It could only be because he thought that other woman cleverer—prettier—yes, prettier,

that carroty-haired creature—younger! Yes—of course she was younger—ten years younger—*that* was her charm.

“ You think I am *passée*—*passée*—and because my shoulders and arms are plump instead of skinny, you think I am getting a middle-aged figure.”

“ My dear girl, you are as charming as when I saw you come to meet me with the casket in your hands, and when I thought the stage lamps had never lighted a lovelier creature. Can’t you understand, Fanny, can’t you believe me when I say that it is because you are my wife, and I love you, that I would rather not act with you? Don’t let us quarrel about it. You told me that day in Hertford Street that you had done with the stage. Stick to that, my love, and let us be happy.”

“ Happy! Have you ever thought what my life is like when you are away—the intolerable dullness?”

“ My dear girl, other women contrive to amuse themselves—lawyers’ wives, merchants’ wives, doctors’ wives, whose husbands have to be absent all day.”

“ But their husbands are at home in the evening. They do not walk out of the house when the clock strikes six—not to come back till midnight.”

After this Godwin declined almost all invitations, and stayed at home on his free nights. He brought some of his nicest friends to his home, and tried to interest them in his wife, and to bring about pleasant relations between her and two or three refined and intelligent women, the wives of his intimate friends. But Fanny had no talent for friendship—she was too frankly egotistical; and she disgusted Godwin’s friends by complaining of his shortcomings, when they considered her supremely fortunate in being the wife of their paragon.

Fanny’s attitude was very different from what it had been before marriage. She was no longer at her husband’s feet, his slave, his worshipper. She was his wife, with an ever-present consciousness of her rights and privileges. She could not accept the subordinate place. She wanted to be always *en évidence*, always admired. She wanted to be the sun—not the moon. Wounded to the quick by Harvey’s treatment, he being only the spokesman of the Committee, she had thought that she was tired of the stage; but after less than half a year of domestic bliss, she was sickening for the footlights, hungering for the excitement and the applause—the changes of costume—the strange clothes that set off her beauty—the picturesque garments in which she could make herself look as young as in the year of her *début*. She

longed to go back to the stage—she hated herself for her folly in having told Godwin she had done with the theatre. Yet, though yearning to be again among them, she still affected a disdainful aversion for the actors who were her husband's associates. She was barely civil to James Tilbury, when Godwin brought him home to supper ; though she knew that he had been her husband's second in the duel, and that there was a real friendship between the two men. She was not over-civil even to Patrick O'Brien, and complained of his taking her husband away from her. She could not fall into the easy-going way of married life, the quiet confidence in each other's affection, the subjection of the weaker to the stronger mind. She wanted to treat her husband as Cleopatra treated Antony ; and Godwin was not of the temper to accept Antony's subjugation. He had married Fanny Fountain because she loved him, married her to shelter and cherish her, and to make her happy ; and it was a shock to find the spirit of discontent in his home.

The Drury Lane season ended in May—and Godwin took advantage of a short interval before his engagements in Scotland to give his wife the postponed honeymoon.

" You complain that I never talk to you of my boyhood and youth," he said ; " you say I keep secrets from you. Well, Fanny, I am going to take you to the scene of my childhood, the stately halls and corridors where I became acquainted with Shakespeare, the majestical roof that covered my childish dreams. I am going to take you to the New Forest."

" I shall be glad to know something about you, something to show me that you are a man as well as an actor, a human being as well as a dreamer of dreams."

" If you have a grudge against actors, you ought not to have married me, Fanny."

" I did not know what it was like to be an actor's wife, and not to be allowed to act with him. But I am glad we are going to have our honeymoon, and I dare say I shall like your Forest. I have heard you and your mother talk about it, as if it were Paradise, but for my own part I only like the country in summer, and I don't think anything in Hampshire can be as pretty as Falmouth."

They left Bedford Square early on a warm May morning, in a post-chaise and four, and dined at Guildford, and slept at Alton, and posted next day to Winchester, where they stayed twenty-four hours, to see the cathedral and St. Cross. For Godwin the water-meadows, the grassy hills, and the old church

and college had a sweet and soothing influence, and the cloud upon Fanny's spirits was dispelled by the luxury of the journey, the comfort of the inns, and the tenderness of her husband; so that before they had been long upon the road she had forgotten her grievances, and had become the honeymoon wife, charmed with all she saw, and as much in love with her husband as in those impassioned hours that had made her his.

They spent a week at Lyndhurst, and he took her through all the scenes of his boyish wanderings—the lawns and glades and moors and woods. He showed her the yews of Sloden, still in their primeval glory, the depth and mystery of Mark Ash, where the sky above the tops of the beeches was deeply blue as a perfect sapphire—and one day their carriage waited for them on the road at Stony Cross, while Godwin took his wife down the hill to Canterton, not without some murmuring about the rough paths, for which her pretty sandalled shoes were not adapted. And here they came upon the brown tents, and the old friends, the tawny children sprawling in the sun, Elspeth sitting by the iron stew-pot, Uncle Ephraim stretched at full length, with the smoke curling upward from his black pipe, to mix with the savoury steam from the iron pot.

That savoury steam attracted Hector, who nosed the old gipsy with a friendly air.

It was some minutes before Godwin was recognised, but Uncle Ephraim was not long in doubt.

"It's our lad, by the living jingo, and a fine gentleman! Well, I'm glad you've come to see us at last, Mr. Godwin. It was uncommon kind of you to send us a present at Christmas as you've done for the last five years, but it's kinder to come and let us see your handsome face."

They shook hands, but that was not enough for the gipsy, who hugged Godwin; or for old Elspeth, who repeated the performance; while Fanny looked on with horror.

"And is this pretty lady your wife?" Elspeth asked.

"Yes, this lady is my wife, and this is our honeymoon. It is the first time since I left the Forest that I have had a chance of coming back. I've been a hard worker, Elspeth, though you mayn't believe it."

The gipsy looked at him with a thoughtful countenance, in which there was a shade of melancholy.

"The gold has come?" she asked.

"Yes, the gold has come," and then, turning to Fanny, he



said, "This good soul is a prophetess, and when I left this place a penniless boy, she told me that I should be rich."

"And my words came true?"

"Yes, Aunt Elspeth—to the letter."

"I wish they hadn't," Elspeth muttered.

Ephraim and the others questioned Godwin eagerly. They had all shaken hands with him, and admired him, and admired his wife. Was there ever such a fine gentleman, and such a lovely lady? And where had he made his fortune? Had he been in India, among the Nabobs and Begums?"

No, he had been acting, that was all. He had been acting in a great London theatre, just as he had acted on the patch of grass in front of the tents. "Just as I used to act Othello when Zenobia was my Desdemona. You remember, Zennie?" he asked, speaking to a dusky young matron with a brown baby at her breast. "Do you remember how you used to lie on a mat—under a curtain, and how I used to smother you with Elspeth's pillow?"

Zenobia remembered, they all remembered, and had a great deal to say about his acting.

"You might have made a bit of money at the Crown and Stirrup," Uncle Ephraim said, "if you would have acted in the taproom, but you was too proud. You must have the big theatre, and the Prince of Wales to see you. And you've got another dog, a fine strong beggar. You've forgotten poor Nick."

"No, I shall never forget Nick."

"You was always one to stick to your friends. And how is the mother that reared you? How is Sally Merritt?"

"Well, and happy, thank God."

"Has she got a better van?"

"No. We have a large house in a London square."

"A large square London house," said Ephraim, scratching his iron-grey head; "I don't think Sally can like that. She wanted to be snug and warm, and to be able to open the door with one hand and the window with the other while she sat by the fire."

"She is reconciled to the large house, and keeps it better than the King's palace."

Fanny stood aloof, looking on, while the whole colony of gipsies gathered round her husband, shaking hands with him, the elders hugging him, the women showing him their children, born since he had left the Forest; all of them admiring him.

She saw him scatter his gold among them, and drop a handful of silver on the turf for the children to scramble for, which they did, fighting each other like little brown puppies. Fanny was astonished—and somewhat disgusted—especially so when Godwin took her hand, and drew her into the middle of the circle, and made her take off her bonnet that his friends might see his pretty wife.

“I make no doubt you’re very fond of him, ma’am,” old Elspeth said somewhat grimly, having noticed that the pretty wife was petulant, and annoyed at having to take off her bonnet. It was the coal-scuttle bonnet of those days, designed rather to shelter than to exhibit beauty. “But you’ll never love him better than we did.”

It was nearly an hour after they had left the carriage when Godwin said good-bye to the camp, and they began to climb the hill, Fanny decidedly out of temper, and complaining of the rough ground.

“You ought to have put on thicker shoes for a woodland walk,” Godwin said.

“I have no thicker shoes. No lady ever wears thick shoes.”

“Doesn’t she? I think if you ask the Duchess she will tell you another story. Women who spend half their lives in the country must be better shod than you are.”

“*The Duchess!* As if there were only one in the world! I am sick of your duchess! I hate paragons.”

He took no notice of the little burst of temper. Nothing more was said till they were sitting side by side in the carriage, when she asked him suddenly:—

“How do you come to be so intimate with those people? Are you a gipsy?”

“No, my love, I am not a gipsy, though I have lived the gipsy life.”

And then he told her about his woodland years, and how his mother for his health’s sake had lived in the Forest. He told her about the van, and the humble, happy days when his mother sold her goods in the Forest villages.

Perhaps he had expected that she would be interested and sympathetic, that his childish history would have the charm of a romance, that she would tell him he was like a prince in a fairy-tale—but she was mute, and he saw that she was pained by his story.

“And did Mrs. Merritt really sell brooms, and did you really

go about in the van with her, and live among those dreadful gipsies ? ”

“ Really—really ! And I loved the gipsies, and I loved the van.”

“ I knew you and your mother were keeping something from me,” she said ; “ but I never thought it was as bad as that.”

“ You think it very bad ? ”

“ Well, you can't suppose that it is a pleasant surprise. Of course I love you just the same, and it doesn't matter that you were brought up like that, since everybody takes you for a gentleman—but oh, Godwin, promise me never to tell anyone else about the gipsies and the van. The gipsies wouldn't so much matter, because you might have been a nobleman's child that they had stolen—but the van, the van with brooms and brushes—no gentleman could come out of a van.”

“ Then I am not a gentleman ? ” he asked gravely.

She was silent for some moments before she answered him.

“ No,” she cried at last, “ you are better than a gentleman ; you are a genius, and I adore you.”

She flung her arms round his neck, and sobbed heart-brokenly—and Godwin understood that this creature of impulse and passion was also a creature of worldliness and conventionality.

Then, after an interval in which she had been sitting with her head on his shoulder—heedless of the bonnet—and his arm round her waist, she said dolefully, “ Then your parents were quite humble people, your father no better born than your mother ? ”

“ Perhaps not. My father never counted in my life. My mother, Sarah Merritt, has been all in all.”

“ She is very kind, and I am fond of her, and she does my hair beautifully. But I always knew she was not a lady.”

“ Not the conventional idea of a lady, you mean. Well, we will leave it so. As long as you love her, I am content.”

“ I shall always love her while she is kind to me.”

“ I will answer for that. She will always be kind.”

Godwin had meant to show Fanny the little shop in Lyndhurst, and the parlour over the shop where O'Brien had introduced him to the classics. But after the scene in Canterton glen he indulged in no more reminiscences of childhood ; and he listened kindly while Fanny expatiated upon the elegance of her own early years : the nursemaid from Jersey who taught her French ; the dancing-

class where she had the Squire's daughters for fellow-pupils ; the Christmas party at the Squire's splendid mansion—and the way her father, the Vicar, was looked up to by the surrounding gentry.

" We did not visit the doctor's family," Fanny concluded. " They were not in our set."

This was all astonishing to Godwin, as he thought she would have seen only the romantic side of his childish days and nights, under the canopy of heaven. He thought she would have been moved by the charm of those Forest deeps, those mysteries of light and shade and loneliness—where he led her—but he found that her only emotion was the fear of adders, and of spoiling her Parisian shoes, or tearing her muslin skirt.

" Do you never forget your clothes ? " he asked, vexed at the fuss she made.

" How can I, when I am wearing them ? "

Fanny having seen as much as she wanted to see of the Forest, they went back to London by Salisbury, Andover, and Basingstoke, which afforded the pleasure of a different road and different inns. Fanny was more concerned about the inns than the landscape, and her husband indulged her with all the luxury due to a bride on her honeymoon. Salisbury Cathedral she dismissed briefly, as exactly like Winchester, which would show that she was not strongly impressed by the architectural features of either fane ; Salisbury Plain tired her feet, and Stonehenge was absurd. She liked the smooth, level roads where she could sit in the carriage, prattle at her ease, with Godwin's arm round her waist, and with no distracting things to look at. Cathedrals, she told him frankly, she had never cared about, perhaps because she was not brought up in a cathedral town, and her father had never taught her anything about architecture.

She was glad when the chaise and four drove into Bedford Square with a flourish. It was the first of June, and London was alive with a new vigour ; the heart of the great city was beating with a new excitement.

Much had been doing while Godwin and his wife had been on their belated wedding journey. The good old King, after a stubborn fight against infirmity—after striving with almost heroic persistence to keep his hold upon the reins of power, conscious of failing mind, yet able at intervals to control his wandering wits, and deliver himself sagely upon affairs of state—had succumbed at last to the inevitable, and had passed from an almost despotic sovereignty into the dominion of doctors and

nurses. His case had been pronounced hopeless, and the Prince of Wales was now Regent—Regent without restrictions, which was tantamount to being King.

He may have loved his father ; he may have even been sorry for the calamity that had befallen the brave old man ; but he could hardly conceal the exultation with which he grasped the authority that he had been longing for. He had come into his own. He was no longer merely the arbiter of fashion, the dictator of the width of a cravat or the height of a hat. He was King. He could open his mouth boldly in the demand for money. As Prince of Wales he had been always asking for money, and never getting quite as much as he wanted. Carlton House was a sink down which there had flowed a ceaseless stream of gold—and Carlton House was still unfinished, and the Prince's debts were still unpaid.

He was now to all intents and purposes King, and although his father was in precarious health, and sorely afflicted, he presently decided to celebrate his accession to power by a fête more magnificent than any entertainment that the present generation had seen.

An evening party—a ball—to which everybody of rank and distinction in the kingdom was to be bidden, except the wife whom the Prince hated, and the daughter of whom he was jealous. Those two were excluded from the fifteen hundred who were invited ; while another lady, the real wife, who was entitled to all honour from her royal husband, was made to feel that there was no place for her at his table. It was that careless insult which decided Mrs. Fitzherbert upon the wisest act of her life—the final severance of a tie that had never brought her happiness.

It had been at first decreed that no lady of less rank than an earl's daughter was to be invited on this illustrious occasion ; but the claims of youth and beauty soon overrode that severe measure, and youth and beauty were bidden without consideration of caste. The struggle for invitations had been fierce ; and the Court functionary whose office it was to issue those charmed pieces of pasteboard had a weary time before the distribution was finished, and the last card had been sent out.

The royal invitation was among Godwin's letters on the night of the return from Hampshire. Mr. and Mrs. Godwin were bidden to the Carlton House party. Godwin had hardly known of the intended festival, and would have perished rather than ask for an invitation, although Fanny, who had read about the coming



splendour in the "Morning Chronicle" and the "Herald," had talked about it more or less all the way home.

Would they get a card, or if not, would Godwin make his duchess ask for one?

"You know she would do anything for you," said Fanny coaxingly.

"She will not do that for me—or anything of that kind."

"You mean, she wouldn't if you asked her?"

"Oh, Fanny, don't you know me well enough to know I am the last man on earth to go where I am not wanted?"

"But you know it would be only an oversight of an equerry or somebody. You know the Prince admires you."

"I know he has sometimes done me the honour to take his after-dinner nap while I am acting."

Upon which Fanny was indignant, and accused him of being prejudiced against his future King, and expatiated upon the accomplishments and virtues of her Prince.

"Whatever fault people may find with his politics—everybody knows that he is the finest gentleman in Europe," she concluded, with flushed cheeks and angry eyes.

Her husband turned upon her with a look that she had seldom seen on his face—a look that scared her.

"Whatever that man may be," he said, "can't you understand that I hate to hear his name on your lips? Have you not suffered enough in consequence of the Prince's folly? You were too young at your début to know the harm such a man's admiration might do you."

"Only in the minds of envious people, who were furious because the Prince raved about me as his ideal Juliet, and told people I was the only Juliet he had ever seen who could act the part while she was young enough to look it. Do you suppose every other actress in London was not green with envy when that speech of his was reported in the newspapers?"

"I see you are proud of your notoriety—but at least let me hear no more of it," Godwin said sternly, and Fanny began to cry. Her tears were always ready when she felt herself at a disadvantage.

She wept quietly for some minutes while Godwin paced the room, heavy of heart, full of dark thoughts.

"And now I suppose you will refuse the Prince's invitation?" she whimpered.

"I can hardly do that. An invitation from the Regent is a command. You might decline on the ground of bad health, if you

like—but as I shall be acting three nights a week I can have no excuse. However, I suppose you want to be at the fête.”

“ I don’t want people to say I wasn’t invited ; as they would if you were seen there without me,” she answered pettishly.

“ Well, Fanny, I don’t think it matters. We shan’t see much of the Regent, or be much seen in the mob.”

“ I can’t go to Carlton House without a new gown.”

“ You shall have a new gown.”

She dried her tear-blotted cheeks, and went to her husband to offer him a grateful kiss—which he accepted somewhat coldly. She felt as if a chasm had opened suddenly between them—not very deep or very wide—but a cleft that parted them somehow. He was paler than usual, and he looked unhappy.

After this there was no more talk of the royal ball till the carriage was at the door, and Fanny was moving about the drawing-room to show Godwin her gown, while Sarah stood by admiring her.

“ You will be the handsomest couple at the fête,” she said, looking from Fanny to Godwin, on whom her gaze rested longest. “ No matter who the others are—princes or commoners.”

Fanny was in white and gold, and her gown was to cost forty pounds, which was much in those days, before Americans who had struck oil, and South Africans who had smuggled diamonds, were giving a new measure for fashionable prices.

The gown was lovely, and Fanny was lovely, and Godwin thought, with a touch of heartache, how proud any man might have felt of so exquisite a wife if—if there had not been that vague fear, that sense of some unfathomed depth under the fair surface.

Perhaps he had gone deeper into his wife’s nature during the leisure and the isolation of their honeymoon than had been possible until they were alone together in scenes of tranquil beauty that made for thought.

The deliberation and the thought that most men give to the question of marriage had never been his. He had gone to Hertford Street on that eventful day with no other idea than to help an unprotected young woman in her financial troubles, and with no lofty estimate of the woman herself. To be in debt was in his mind disgraceful. He who had suffered hunger rather than take credit for a meal, who had gone from town to town over half England and never left an unpaid bill behind him, could have little respect for a woman whose liberal salary could not suffice for her wants.

He went to her rescue, full of kindness, but without a thought of love. A storm of passion had thrown her into his arms ; a generous impulse had made him her husband. And it was only during their honeymoon that he began to think profoundly of the woman with whose fate he had charged himself—to cherish and guard her, to go hand in hand with her through sunshine and shadow, through the flowers or the thorns upon the road, and down the vale of years. All their happiness must depend upon their unassailable faith in each other. Alas, he had found that she was wanting in sympathy and in understanding—that she was self-centred, and incapable of interesting herself in the things for which her husband lived. His ambition to her seemed only vanity, his delight in discussing every part he acted was rank egotism. His art as an art she had never appreciated ; and she was irritated by the importance he attached to a new reading, or an original view of a character whose possibilities seemed to have been exhausted by Betterton and done to death by Garrick.

Nor had she any appreciation of literature outside the drama. Wordsworth was prosy and common, Coleridge a harmless lunatic. Her husband's reverence for the stars of the literary world was a wonder to her—except in the case of Moore and Byron, about whom she could rave with more than fashionable fervour.

Sadly Godwin saw the gulf that yawned between them. In the short space of their married life he had been trying to inspire her with the love of lofty things, and to prove to her that there was nothing low or mean in the actor's art ; but it was not till their long rambles in the Forest, and their long evenings in the inn-parlour, that he realised the futility of all such endeavour. She was just Fanny Fountain, beautiful, loving and lovable, capricious, impulsive, and alas, unmistakably selfish. Worst of all she was weak. The virtues most needful in woman are the strong virtues—chastity, fidelity, truth. In the weak woman these have to be cultivated with the care the horticulturist gives to his choicer and more delicate plants. They are not spontaneous and innate. They are not an invincible armour against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil. She was weak ; too easily influenced, too easily pleased or offended, too easily swayed to this side or the other.

Well, being so, it was the supreme duty of a husband to guard and cherish her. Godwin told himself that this must be his chief task in life. He had something to do that must come before the

theatre. That which had been his paramount and all-absorbing interest must henceforward be subordinate to the compact he had entered into with this woman.

It was not a long drive from Bedford Square to Carlton House, but there was plenty of time for dark thought while the carriage waited in the summer night, in a triple row of carriages—some splendid as Cinderella's fairy coach-and-six—torches blazing, footmen running backwards and forwards, impatient horses plunging, bewigged coachmen protesting, and a dense crowd on the footpath, pressing to get a glimpse of the faces and the jewels in the carriages, a crowd sufficiently outspoken in its comments.

"Ain't she an old 'un! 'My eye and Betty Martin!'"

"Look at her dimons!"

"And look at her scraggy neck!"

Then, as the non-appearance of the Queen Consort of England was borne in upon the populace, "What's come o' snuffy Charlotte? Ain't she a-comin' to her favourite son's party? Favourite son! Why, you know she 'ates the sight of 'im. There goes Nosey, pore Carline's best friend. There's my Lord Lonnonderry. 'Im as is such a pet of the Oirish."

It was a long time before Godwin's carriage could reach the royal door, where the scarlet coats and snowy plumes of the household troops on guard at the entrance, made a blaze of colour in a flood of light.

Fanny looked about her, almost bewildered by the brilliancy of the hall, where lanterns and lamps without number lit up the uniform of the Yeomen of the Guard, and the state liveries of the King's, the Regent's, the Queen's, and the royal dukes' servants, stationed in close rank, and making an avenue of splendour through which the guests passed to the inner hall, where the Prince's equerries, and several of his friends and favourites, were waiting to receive the company.

Fanny looked about her with a disappointed air. She was prepared to drop her curtsy to the grand Panjandrum; and the grand Panjandrum was not there. These gentlemen in their Court uniform were only his servants. She heard afterwards that the Regent was doing the honours of his house to the banished King of France and his son and niece. She made a sweeping curtsy to the equerry who came forward to receive her; but though her gown swept the ground she held her head very high, and ignored the hand held out for hers. Yet this gentleman and his Court uniform were not unfamiliar, since he had once been

a visitor in the bijou house in Hertford Street where Miss Fountain was at home to her friends on the evenings when she was not acting, and where Aunt Lavinia had tasted the bliss of playing whist with royal dukes.

All these gentlemen—the equerries, the favourites, the men who wore stars on their breasts—knew Godwin ; and he had to pass through a ring of friends, and acknowledge the most flattering greetings before he and his wife were free to move through the dazzling vista of the long suite of rooms to the spot where the sound of dance-music from a military band was attracting the young and the frivolous.

The June night was warm, and the majority of the Prince's guests were amusing themselves in passing from room to room, admiring the decorations, and looking at each other. Never had so many lovely women been seen together ; never such splendour of jewels, albeit the Crown diamonds were wanting to that magnificent display, Queen Charlotte and the Court party having held themselves aloof from a festival which seemed an act of deliberate disrespect to the King of England, wandering restless and melancholy, with darkened sight, in his lonely rooms at Windsor.

Many people spoke of the old King, and discussed the taste and tactfulness of this sumptuous entertainment, which it was suggested would cost more than a battleship.

The Regent meanwhile was laying himself at the feet of the exiled royalty of France, in a room furnished expressly for the occasion, the walls upholstered in satin powdered with fleurs-de-lis. To do honour to these royal exiles, with almost exaggerated courtesy, suited his sentimental temper ; and while rendering his tearful homage to the heir of Capet, he had no time to think of his *bête noire*, the unhappy lady at Blackheath, or of his once idolised Maria Fitzherbert, or of that fair young daughter who was not allowed even to look on at the festival.

Godwin and his wife perambulated the rooms with the rest of the company, and had often to stop and talk with his friends, who were all kind to Fanny. But Fanny was disappointed. She had seen no prettier gown than her own, which the Duchess of Pentland had admired—but then the wearers of other gowns sparkled with jewels, and other heads no fairer than hers flashed light from diamond tiaras as they moved through the crowd. Fanny was wearing a diamond cross for which her husband had paid Hamlet two hundred guineas ; but how poor and paltry a thing it seemed among crowns and breastplates of gems.



Fanny was beginning to be tired of that slow moving through the dazzling vista, and the talk with people whom she suspected of being more interested in her husband than in herself.

"It is the same wherever I go," she thought. "I am nobody."

She had looked on at a quadrille in the ballroom, where the floor had been decorated with floral devices in coloured chalks by an expensive artist, and where there was room enough for two sets of dancers. She had seen everything and everybody, except the giver of the feast; and now she threatened Godwin with one of her headaches—that exclusive malady from which nobody else had ever suffered; but on his offering to take her home without waiting for supper, she told him he could know nothing of Court functions, if he suggested such a thing.

"It would be horribly discourteous to the Prince," she said.

"Would it be high treason? No, I suppose it would be only *lèse-majesté*. But would he miss us?" Godwin asked, with a sardonic smile.

Perhaps other people were beginning to be almost as bored as Mrs. Godwin, and gentlemen with stars were yawning behind gloved hands, when a sudden burst of strings and brasses in the opening chords of the National Anthem gave a thrill of pleasure—for it might mean supper.

God save the King—not this portly Prince here, suddenly appearing in his gaudy uniform (not in the best taste, nor particularly well made) with a diamond star, aigrette and sabre, but the poor old King at Windsor, the King who had compared himself with Lear, with Samson Agonistes—with the two saddest figures in the story of fallen greatness.

With the magic word supper, a new life informed that vast assembly, and everybody was alert and expectant. It seemed as if the mere appearance of that royal figure, the scarlet uniform, the resplendent star, and jewelled sabre, had made for gaiety. The hum of a thousand voices grew louder, the movement of the sparkling throng became quicker. The Prince's guests no longer sauntered listlessly, looking this way and that. Every movement converged to one spot; every countenance expressed one emotion; eyes shone, and cheeks flushed with pleased expectancy—supper!

Would it—could it possibly be a sit-down supper? Could even Carlton House and the Regent's Sardanapalian expenditure find room for all that vast assembly to sit and feed at leisure? No—it could only be a stand-up feast—a buffet—a scramble of

greedy men and fainting women, snatching sandwiches, and grasping champagne-glasses in a seething mob.

The answer to those harrowing doubts came when the Regent and the heir of Capet had passed in solemn state from hall to hall.

There was room for everybody ; there were covers for everybody—not even one wicked fairy being forgotten—gold and silver plate and to spare for everybody. There were supper-tables in the vast Gothic conservatory, lighted with myriad rainbow lampions, in a great marquee, in every room along the dazzling suite, from the central hall to the eastern end of the palace. Never within the memory of courtiers had there been so imperial a banquet.

“ There can have been nothing like it since Belshazzar’s feast,” said Tommy Moore, tucking his little legs under the table ; “ and I hope I shall finish my supper before we get the writing on the wall.”

Fanny found herself sitting by her husband at the royal table. One of Godwin’s aristocratic admirers had insisted upon placing him there, the only commoner among princes and ambassadors, and greatness of all kinds. Godwin had refused to sit at the august board, but his friend, Lord Harringay, insisted.

“ Art has its own rank, and among the highest,” he said, while Fanny tugged at her husband’s arm, to make him accept the vacant place, allotted to an Austrian duke, who had not come to claim it.

Fanny forgot the threatened headache, and sparkled with delight. She was at the Panjandrum’s table—but, alas ! the table was two hundred feet long, and Romeo was too far away to be conscious of his once-admired Juliet. He was sitting at the head of the table, in front of a tremendous trophy of gold plate and crimson velvet—a sumptuous background of red and gold. A fountain flashed in front of him, from which there flowed a stream of water, and all along the table there ran a river in a silver bed between banks of moss and flowers, a river in which goldfish swam and splashed and glittered and died. The silver plateau with the running water and expiring fish was the crowning wonder of the feast. Everybody was talking about those finny victims, and peering at them, everybody who was not too busily engaged with the supper, the hot soups and roasts, the boars’ heads and game pies, the gorgeous palaces and solemn temples of spun sugar, fashioned by the Prince’s Italian confectioners, the fruit from every clime and every country, from

tropical India and the orchard houses of Frogmore. The popping of champagne corks was fast and furious as the file-firing of musketry.

Godwin was glad to get out of the heated atmosphere, surcharged with the fumes of wine, the reek of savoury meats, the scent of strawberries, peaches, pineapples, Bergamot, Otto of Rose, and Ess. Bouquet. All Fanny had been able to see of the Regent was the flash of rainbow light from his star, a glittering point at the end of the long perspective. She was not sorry to leave the table where less privileged people who had supped at other tables were crowding and leaning over her to look at the expiring gudgeons in the silver river.

She was not even sorry to find herself drifting away from her husband in the mob as it moved along the rooms that led to the ballroom. An old friend had discovered her in the crowd, a middle-aged warrior in a fine uniform. Fanny felt it a privilege to be escorted by such a person, who complimented her upon her appearance, and told her she looked younger than at their last meeting half a dozen years ago.

She was quite happy with this old acquaintance, and was prattling gaily about that world of fashion, the very fringe of which was precious to her, when she was startled by seeing her husband on the other side of the room engaged in conversation with that large and splendid figure which, move where it would, was the cynosure of every eye.

"The Prince is talking to my husband," she gasped.

"Why not?" asked Colonel Arden. "The Regent is one of your husband's most enthusiastic admirers. You know how devoted he was to the drama and one of its fairest interpreters, when he was younger and less heavily weighted with cares of state."

The crowd had fallen away from the place where the Prince and the actor were standing, making an open space round those two figures, and the contrast between Godwin, tall and slender in his swallow-tail coat and black satin breeches, and royalty's extensive person in scarlet and gold was somewhat striking.

One of the Prince's equerries wheeled an arm-chair forward when the conversation had lasted for some minutes, and the Prince sank into the velvet cushions, and went on talking, with evident enjoyment. However lightly or even contemptuously some people might think of the first gentleman in Europe, he had at least the merit of being able to talk about literature,

music, and the drama, with understanding and unaffected pleasure. He kept Godwin by his side for a considerable time, while Colonel Arden took Fanny to the marquee in the garden, where dancing was going on merrily in a ballroom wreathed with roses. That other and more wonderful rose, the light that comes before the sun, was in the sky when Fanny and her friend came back to the room where the Prince and the actor were still engaged in conversation. They had been talking for nearly half an hour.

The Prince rose, and left the room, leaning on his equerry's arm, without seeing Fanny, and Godwin came to look for his wife.

"Oh, there you are at last, Fanny. It's past three, and we must go and find our carriage. What, have you been taking care of my wife, Arden? Very kind of you. I lost her in the crowd an hour ago, and have been looking for her ever since."

"Not while you were talking with the Prince," Fanny said angrily.

"No, I was rooted to the spot while the Regent honoured me with his conversation."

"You did not tell him that you had your wife to look after."

"My dear Fanny, that would have been a fresh subject, and it is against etiquette to start a conversation. The Prince was good enough to expatiate upon 'Hamlet' and 'Othello,' and I could only listen and acquiesce."

"I suppose you would have done that whatever nonsense he talked," said Fanny.

"The Prince did not talk nonsense. His enunciation was not very clear—but he spoke with taste and understanding."

"Of course he praised your acting—and that would be enough," said Fanny, whereupon Godwin bade Colonel Arden good night, and took his wife away.

"I had no idea you knew Arden," she said, as they went towards the hall.

"We have met a good many times. I am sorry I missed you in that mob, Fanny; but it really was not my fault. And now if your shoes are not too thin, we had better go out into the morning air and hunt for the carriage. We might have to wait hours before it can come to the door."

A linkman ran before them and pretended to help, while they walked the length of Pall Mall, to and fro, looking at the triple rank of carriages. The June morning was delicious, and if Fanny's satin shoes had been thicker, Godwin would have asked

her to walk home. It was weary work hunting for the modest clarence, in those ranks of splendid coaches; but it was found at last, and Fanny flung herself into a corner, and burst into tears, while her husband satisfied the useless linkman with a handful of silver.

"You are tired to death, poor child," he said, trying to draw her towards him.

But she shrank away offended.

"My love, what have I done? Is it my fault that the rooms were too hot?"

"It was your fault that the Prince treated me like dirt."

"Fanny?"

"I suppose he never even mentioned my name."

"He was talking of Shakespeare, and Kemble, and other actors."

"And never mentioned me! As if I hadn't acted in Shakespeare, as if I hadn't taken the town by storm in Juliet before anybody in London had ever heard of you!"

"My dearest, can you suppose that I am elated by the Regent's civil speeches? Why are you angry?"

"I am not angry. I am hurt—wounded to the quick that I should have been treated as a cipher—that you could have stood there talking to the Prince for an hour, and should not have let him know that your wife was on the other side of the room, waiting to be presented to him."

"Fanny! Have you no sense? Don't you know how reluctantly I entered that house with you to-night? If the invitation had been less than a command—if my position as an actor had been less public—I would never have crossed that threshold. I thought you and I could pass unnoticed in the crowd—I wanted no compliments, no patronage, from the Regent. But it was his whim to condescend; and I had no choice but to be as civil as he was. Here we are at our own door—very lucky to get there. Dry your tears, and don't let my mother see a sad face in the sunrise."

Fanny dabbed her eyelids with her lace handkerchief.

"I must be looking horribly old in this ghastly light," she said. "I can feel it."

Mrs. Merritt opened the door, a comfortable figure in a neat merino gown. She had had a good sleep between twelve and three, she told them, and had got up in good time to light a fire and prepare breakfast.

"And now you are to tell me all about the Regent's party,"



she said, when they were seated in the library, Fanny cowering over the fire, shivering in the keen morning air. That hour of sunrise was chilly, even in June ; and Fanny was not accustomed to early hours.

" I'm afraid you didn't enjoy the ball," Sarah said gravely, " for you don't look happy, either of you."

" It isn't the Prince's fault if Godwin isn't happy," Fanny said pettishly.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE Regent's party was soon forgotten—although it was not without disastrous consequences. By the Prince's gracious desire the general public were admitted to Carlton House to see the decorations, and an assemblage of thirty thousand people resulted in a crush in which various legs and arms were broken, and a good many of the Prince's subjects were more or less seriously hurt.

Fanny, who had recovered her spirits by this time, wanted to take Mrs. Merritt to see the splendours amidst which she had paraded among the flower of the aristocracy—but here Godwin objected.

"Fanny and I have had enough of Carlton House," he said. "She will never go there again, nor I, unless I am obliged."

"You will go there to-morrow, if the Prince asks you to a man's dinner," she said, as she flung herself out of the room.

The marriage of pity was a failure, and the union which had begun with generous feeling on one side, and impassioned love on the other, was now no better than an armed neutrality. After that night at Carlton House, Godwin had taken up a new position with his wife. He was no longer the indulgent husband, smiling at whims and caprices, treating his pretty wife as if she were a spoilt child, whose privilege it was to be troublesome and exacting. He was not unkind, he was never sullen. He talked to her when she wanted to talk, and took her for country drives and walks in the sweet summer mornings. He was still kind; but his manner had a seriousness that made her miserable. He had left off talking to her about his opinions and ideas, and hardly ever spoke of the theatre, or what he was doing there; but he gave her more of his company than he had done in the days before their honeymoon; and he showed a keener interest in her life.

It was less than a week after the Carlton House fête when he came home from a late rehearsal, and found his wife brighter and better tempered than she had been since that unsatisfactory evening.

"You look livelier than usual, Fanny. Something must have happened."

"Wasn't it time for something to happen? Yes, something very trivial and unimportant, but anything is an event in this great dull house; if the cook catches a mouse, or the butcher brings the wrong joint. I have had a visitor."

"Was it the Duchess? She told me she was coming to see you."

"She has not carried out that gracious intention. You know very well that you are the person she cares about. I am a cipher with her—as I was at Carlton House."

"For God's sake let us hear no more of Carlton House. Who was your visitor?"

"Colonel Arden."

"What brought him here?"

"His tilbury, and the wish to be polite to your wife. Was that so extraordinary?"

"I don't want such visits."

"Perhaps I do."

"I hope not, Fanny. The man is well enough in his way—but he is a man's man—drinks like a fish, and tells improper stories."

"He would not do that in my hearing," Fanny said, with a magnificent air.

"How did you become acquainted with him?"

"In the green-room at Covent Garden. He came there almost every night when I was acting."

"That was all very well. He was one among your many admirers; but I don't want him in this house, and you can't want such a visitor."

Fanny yawned obtrusively.

"I want anybody or anything that can enliven this sepulchral house."

"How long did he stay?"

"You must ask your mother. She was in the drawing-room when he came. I did not look at the clock, and my watch has left off going."

"A common failing in a watch that is hardly ever wound."

Fanny yawned again.

"Put on your hat and come for a walk."

"I don't feel equal to one of your walks."

"Then we'll go into the Square, and saunter or sit, as you please. It is too lovely a day to stop inside four walls."

"God knows I am sick of these four walls," Fanny murmured, as she took up a hat that had been lying on the sofa.

"You have been out this morning?" Godwin said quickly, taking note of the hat.

"I walked round the Square with Colonel Arden, who pretended to admire the trees."

Godwin made no remark, and they went out together and sauntered under elms that had been young when Steele and Addison were dining in the neighbouring square of Bloomsbury. They walked side by side in silence. Godwin was too indignant and too miserable for speech. If he spoke it would be to say something unkind; and he did not want to be unkind. But he told himself that there must be no more visits from this hanger-on of the Regent's.

"It isn't much livelier than it was in the house," Fanny said at last.

Godwin sighed.

"The rehearsal was long and troublesome," he said. "The actors were stupid. One would think they had never spoken a line of blank verse in their lives, from the way they attack a new part."

They had been rehearsing "The Revenge," in which Godwin was soon to make one of his startling successes as Zanga.

He and his wife went back to the house, silent and depressed. He was unhappy, and could see nothing but unhappiness before him. What could he do for this woman? Alas, nothing, unless he could put a new soul into her.

He thought, with an exquisite pain, of that other woman whose face had thrilled him. To have loved her—and to have married Fanny Fountain! What abject folly! He wondered how many men in this chaotic life had flung away their chance of happiness upon the impulse of a moment. And all the time Fanny was thinking how badly she had been used, and how hard it was to be an actor's wife. How could an actor make a wife happy? All his interest was in the theatre, all his delight was in that sham world for which his heart beat and his brain burnt. To be applauded; to be the central point of that great theatre; to work upon the feelings of that mass of humanity—a random collection of all sorts and conditions of men and women—to make them weep or laugh, to make them burn with indignation or melt with pity. This was all that Godwin cared about. He acted in his dreams. She had heard his sleeping voice murmur

Othello's dying speech, or Hamlet's invocation of his father's spirit.

Colonel Arden had pretended to admire her drawing-rooms, especially the back room with its wide window, and that pleasant glimpse of the gardens of Montagu House : but when she had complained of its dullness—so large and so empty of life—he had reverted to the bijou house in Hertford Street, and the brilliant visitors he had seen there. And then they had talked of the middle-aged Marcellus, of Prince Charming, who had the gift of attracting wit and talent, and who had moved through life with all that was best in this world in his train. His grace, his wit, his tact, his versatility ; his inimitable manner, which was more noble than genius in meaner men ! Fanny could never tire of expatiating upon that marvellous personage.

" I'm afraid you must have found his personal appearance deteriorated since those happy days," Colonel Arden had said.

" He is certainly stouter, but he has all his old dignity. Indeed, I thought he looked more dignified than ever. But perhaps it was only the effect of his uniform and that splendid star."

" You would notice a loftier carriage, if it was the first time you had seen him as Regent. He has put on a grander air since his assumption of unrestricted power. But he is just as much *bon enfant* as ever, among his friends—of whom it is my privilege to number myself."

They talked of the Regent while they walked in the Square, and at parting Fanny begged her old acquaintance to come again.

" I am moped to death with no livelier company than my mother-in-law—an admirable housekeeper, and nothing but a housekeeper," she said. " I am always glad to see old friends."

" But your husband has troops of friends—I meet him everywhere."

" His friends don't care twopence for me. They sicken me by the way they flatter him. It is they who have made him an egotist."

Colonel Arden promised to repeat his visit.

" I shall have more to tell you about the Prince next time," he said.

Fanny blushed, and then turned pale.

" Would he bring the Prince to see her ? " she wondered.

No, that must not be. That one supreme moment of her life came back to her, when she had faced Godwin in the clear light from the winter sky, and had given him the answer upon which her marriage depended ; and that other dreadful moment after



the duel, when the question had been asked again, and she had felt the sound of rushing waters in her brain, and then darkness. She had won him at the price of a lie. And now that love had flamed and faded, her thought was not remorse for having deceived him, but a sickening fear of his anger, if he were to make awkward discoveries.

Colonel Arden came again: and other visitors from the exclusive world—the inner ring of fashion—the first of the first—came to see Mrs. Godwin in Bedford Square, which was already remote, and a place to be apologised for; though Lord Eldon and other notable personages lived there.

Godwin heard of these visits with a darkening brow. Fanny displayed a commendable frankness, for as "Mother" knew of her visitors, any attempt at concealment would have been futile. Nor did Godwin hide his displeasure.

"You are perfectly aware that I hate these hangers-on of yours," he said. "Yet you encourage them—though you must know that I cannot shut my door against them without the risk of a quarrel that might end badly."

"Do you mean that they would call you out? I don't suppose any of them would think it quite the thing to fight a duel with an actor."

"Then don't let them force an actor to horsewhip any of them."

"What can your objection be to such harmless visitors, mere butterflies who come to waste half an hour in my drawing-room, and to enliven me with their gossip about a world I never hear of? Such a relief after everlasting talk of the theatre!"

Godwin had been walking about the room, his brain throbbing furiously. There were pulses in his brain too easily accelerated. Anything that moved him strongly set that machine going at forty-horse-power. He pulled himself together, commanded his temper, and seated himself quietly by his wife's side.

"Fanny, how long have we been married?"

She hesitated, and counted her fingers. "A little more than four months."

"Hardly long enough for us to be tired of each other."

"You mean that you are tired of me?"

"No, it is you who are tired. It is you whose love is dead—a love that was to defy Fate."

"I love you as much as ever, although you hold me at arm's length, and do everything to show that you have left off caring for me. What has Colonel Arden done to offend you? Is he not one of your innumerable friends, an old friend?"

"An old acquaintance—never a friend."

"Oh, you have only woman friends—your duchess, and that other fine lady—who used to be in her box every night gazing at you? Colonel Arden has been in this house at one of your grand supper-parties."

"Colonel Arden was brought here by Mr. Moore. He has never been my friend."

"Well, now that he wishes to see more of you——"

"Of my wife, you mean."

"No, of you, of you! He raves about your Sir Giles Overreach. Why can't you be civil, and ask him to dinner—and Sir Henry Vavasour—just a quiet little dinner—just you and I, and the Duchess of Pentland—a man or two—Tommy Moore, for instance—and your Lady Beaumont, if you like?"

Godwin flushed.

"I have only met Lady Beaumont once in my life," he said. "No, Fanny, I shall never ask Arden or Vavasour or any of that set to my house."

"Your house has become a monastery, or a prison, since I came to it," she exclaimed angrily, and rose from the sofa where he had placed himself beside her, to make one of those tearful exits that left him without a remedy.

Thus ended one of his attempts to reason with her—to make an appeal to her feelings. Other attempts followed, and proved as vain. He had to discover the strength of will in a weak woman, when will takes the form of obstinacy—will to do the wrong thing, and the thing she knows to be wrong.

Godwin was powerless. He could not forbid his house to these flies with gilded wings, who to his mind were poisonous insects. He could do nothing to cast a slur upon his wife. He talked the situation over with his mother—speaking freely of the men he disliked—but with no word that implied doubt of his wife's discretion.

"Your place must be in the drawing-room whenever these men are here," he said. "Let them understand that an actor's wife is as jealously guarded by her women-folk as a duke's—that our house is not to be made a lounging-place for their idleness."

Sarah was equal to the occasion. She was a woman of remarkable adaptability, and had learnt much of the manners and ideas of society since Godwin had been famous. She had no disposition to book-learning, and could see Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Coleridge, and hear them talk, without wanting to read their poetry, though that lively little Dublin gentleman, Mr. Moore,

had inspired her with the desire to read "Lalla Rookh," which she greatly relished. For the rest, Shakespeare was enough for her in the world of poetry, and him she had learnt to love on the lips of the actors and actresses who had given life to his creations. There were not many people in London who could have come through an examination in the five great tragedies as well as Mrs. Merritt.

Though she was not a bookish person, Sarah was a great reader. The reading she liked was of the world she lived in—the actual things that happened yesterday, were happening to-day, and might happen to-morrow. She read the newspapers from start to finish: the morning papers, "Times," "Post," and "Chronicle," the evening papers, the Sunday papers. Not a paragraph in any one of them escaped Sarah. Politics, Church, law, crime, theatres, fashion, gossip, and scandal. Sarah read and remembered all. She plodded through the parliamentary debates, and knew who had spoken in the Lords and in the Commons, and how he had spoken. She had her favourite orators, and was moved by their eloquence. She read and remembered, and had her own opinions, sometimes very strong ones, on the question of Catholic emancipation, on the conduct of the war in Spain, on the Ministry, and on the Opposition—and this knowledge of things that had just happened, or were happening, gave her plenty of material for conversation. She might appear a very simple person, as she sat knitting by the fireside, or by an open window, in her son's drawing-room; but visitors who talked to her found she had plenty to say, and were pleased with her shrewd observations and quick understanding.

It was only a week after that last tearful exit of Fanny's that her husband was surprised at finding himself welcomed with a smile when he came to breakfast at his usual late hour.

"I thought you were never coming," Fanny said, holding up an open letter. "Your duchess has taken it into her head to be civil to me at last."

"At last! Why, she has called upon you more than once since she came to London, and she asked you to meet the Princess."

"That was ages ago. She must have given ever so many parties since then. We ought to be on her list. However, this is rather a nice invitation, and she writes a letter, which is much more friendly than a card. But if I am to go, I shall want a new gown."

An invitation and a new gown were synonymous in Fanny's mind.

The letter was brief and friendly.

“ THE RUSHES, CHISWICK.

“ July 2nd.

“ Dear Mrs. Godwin,

“ I have taken Lord Elstree’s riverside villa for the rest of this summer, and I am giving a *déjeuner dansant* there at one o’clock on Thursday week. I hope you and your husband will come. I see he does not act that night, so I think he will spare a few hours to gratify me.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ URSULA PENTLAND.”

“ You see, it is of you she thinks. It is you she wants. You are the star,” Fanny said, with a little mocking laugh, as she handed him the letter.

Lord Elstree’s villa was a low white house that had begun a hundred years before as the homestead on a small farm, and had gradually expanded into a commodious villa, set in a garden on the edge of the Thames. All along the river banks, from Fulham to Maidenhead, from the Vice-Chancellor’s house at Barn Elms to “ Cliveden’s proud alcove,” there were villas and gardens, green lawns dipping their edges into the blue water ; bowers of roses as by Bendemeer’s stream ; and the nightingale sang to the English roses as sweetly as any bird in Cashmere. Chiswick was a place of riverside meadows and forest trees shading quiet country roads, and Chiswick town was only a cluster of Georgian houses, grouped about the old church, where the curfew was rung o’ nights, and where Hogarth was sleeping in the shadow of the tower.

Mr. and Mrs. Godwin drove down to The Rushes, in an open carriage, and Fanny’s new muslin gown and leghorn hat were all that they should be, and Fanny was in high spirits. New clothes exhilarated her like champagne.

They were late, as Godwin was rehearsing that morning, and did not leave the theatre till one o’clock. The *déjeuner* was in full progress in several rooms ; all the pretty parlours on a level with the garden being brought into use for the occasion, and ripples of laughter and the jingle of glass and silver sounded from the open windows. The dancing had begun in a marquee on the lawn, to the music of a military band.

Fanny flushed and sparkled at the sound of that gay music.

"They are WALTZING!" she told Godwin in an awe-stricken voice.

The Duchess gave them a cordial welcome. She was in a garden in front of the porch, where no guests could arrive without her seeing them, and she had a couple of nieces and two or three nephews in attendance upon her—Lord Angus, and Lord Alastair and Lord Ronald, nephews of the Duke, whose sister had married a marquis. They were not of Duchess Ursula's blood, Fanny knew, having discovered to her great satisfaction that Godwin's duchess was a nobody, neither more nor less than the daughter of a Glasgow dean. "There were two great hulking sons and five red-haired daughters," Colonel Arden had told Fanny. "The Duchess was not so carroty as her sisters, and she was much handsomer. It was a love match. The Duke was shooting grouse on the Argyllshire hills when he fell in with the Dean and his family, taking a cheap holiday at a farmhouse on the mountain-side. It was a story of love at first sight. But there never was a wiser choice. She has been an admirable wife, and the Duke has never left off worshipping her."

"Lucky creature," sighed Fanny, who never heard of a woman's high fortune without thinking it was something she had missed. She had wanted to marry Godwin: but it seemed rather hard that she should not have married a duke, like the famous Polly, or at least an earl, like Miss Farren. She who had been the rage among the bloods in London ought to have had better chances of making a great match than a parson's daughter in the wilds of Argyllshire.

The Duchess put Fanny in charge of one of her lordlings, who escorted her to the luncheon-rooms, where it was not easy to find places at any of the crowded tables; and Godwin and his wife met no more until the sun was sloping westward.

Fanny ate lobster-salad and sipped champagne with a becoming indifference to such sensuous pleasures. Lord Angus was attentive, and said charming things with a Scottish accent that made them almost unintelligible; but Fanny could see that he admired her, and to be admired by a courtesy lord was enough for the joy of the hour.

She smiled and simpered; but she was looking eagerly along both sides of the table, in search of familiar faces.

"Are any of the Prince's set here?" she asked at last.

"The Regent's crew? I think not. My aunt loathes them."

"Is not that rather unfair on Her Grace's part?"

"Not to my mind. Royal favourites are seldom worth much."



"Then you share your aunt's prejudice against all those gentlemen?"

"I have known three or four of them, and have seen no reason to take an opposite view."

Fanny began to think him atrociously Caledonian. Only a Scotsman could have expressed himself with that dogmatic air, at two or three and twenty.

"Has the dancing been going on long?" she asked, tired of trifling with strawberries and cream, while her companion consumed Perigord pie, and drank deep of his aunt's champagne.

"The youngsters began at two o'clock."

"They are waltzing?" Fanny asked eagerly.

"They care for nothing else nowadays. Lord Byron's poem has only given them a keener zest. Wouldn't you like to take a turn?"

"I am longing for it. Do you waltz?"

Fanny asked the question hesitatingly, fearing she might wound his feelings. Was it likely this son of Caledonia had acquired that divine art, still new to Englishmen?

"I was at the Embassy at Vienna—where there were three or four balls a week. Will you give me the next waltz?"

He took Fanny to the tent, where the band was playing one of Weber's waltzes.

Fanny had had no formal lessons in the foreign dance: but she was a dancer by instinct, and her partner was charmed with her.

Godwin was detained by his duchess, and took his champagne and chicken with her in a little room at the end of the suite, a room which she had reserved for her intimates.

"My husband wants to see you for a few minutes before you go," she told him, when he had inquired about the Duke's health. "Our quiet time in Rothesay did him worlds of good, and he is much better, thank God, or you may imagine I should not be giving this frivolous party. My concert was a necessity. The Princess offered herself, and there was no escape. I wondered that she should be going anywhere while her sister was hopelessly ill, and the King in so sad a state—but she is a good creature *au fond*, as I suppose they all are—only curious."

"Even the Regent? Is there something good at the bottom of that heart?"

"Judged by his treatment of his wretched wife, it ought to be all black; but he has a vein of tenderness in his nature which

shows occasionally. He is a creature of sentiment, and he can do kind things—indeed, I know of many kind things he has done ; but his animosities are terrible. If he had married a really good woman, a fine character, with beauty and brains, perhaps he might have been different.”

“ Is not Mrs. Fitzherbert good—and a fine character—as well as handsome and clever ? ”

“ She is a good woman, but a left-handed marriage put them both in the wrong. And then she is too much like himself, a shade frivolous, and careless about debt. He wanted a woman of strong mind—a woman who would love him and rule him.”

“ A Lady Macbeth without the criminal instinct,” said Godwin smiling.

“ Yes, a Lady Macbeth. That woman would have been a perfect wife if she had not wanted her husband to be King.”

The conversation changed upon this. The Duchess praised Fanny’s pretty looks and graceful manners.

“ People talk of Lady Derby’s fine manners, as if it were a wonder that the most accomplished actress in genteel comedy should know how to behave in her own drawing-room. I have known a good many actresses in my time, and they were all charming. The men are not so good, or so fortunate. If they are successful they take to drink and low company, or get themselves involved in some odious intrigue. They are not like you, Godwin. You are a prince—the ideal prince, not like the princes we know—but the prince whom the Muses have made royal.”

She looked at him with clouded eyes, and gave him her hand across the small round table. A woman of sixty-five may do such things, and fear no misconception. Godwin knew his friend too well for foolish thoughts. He had filled an empty place in the heart that had ached for the loss of a son. The son whose portrait she had shown him in the lowland castle was the link between her and the young man in whose genius she delighted.

“ By the way,” she said presently, “ the lady you admire, and yet don’t admire, is here to-day. The woman whose pulses are stirred by your acting, but whom you think cold and heartless.”

“ Lady Beaumont ? ”

“ Yes, Lady Beaumont. She will be in London till the end of the season—and then Switzerland—Italy—Norway—Sweden—the North Pole—anywhere to escape ennui.”

“ She was with you the first time I played Sir Giles.”

"Yes, she took an early dinner with me, and gave me a seat in her box."

"She has been there very seldom of late."

"Oh, she knows all your Shakespearian characters by heart. Massinger's play was something new. I have always thought it a horrid play; but you were magnificent—as you were in Young's "Revenge," another horrid play. You looked like Michael Angelo's rebellious Archangel."

"Is Lady Beaumont's brother with her to-day?"

"No—for once in her life he is not at his post. He usually goes with her everywhere, and watches her as a cat watches the hole where he suspects a mouse."

"He is not an agreeable person."

"He is detestable, and I wonder at her patience. His life has been a failure—or something worse than a failure—a scandal—and he visits his disappointments upon his sister, who took him from his dying mother's arms when he was a little child, and promised to love and cherish him. That promise involved much more than the girl of nine years can have dreamt of, for there is a strain of madness in this young man which showed itself in a gloomy fanaticism more in harmony with the Middle Ages than with our modern world. It may be some hereditary taint, from those dark days when his Scottish ancestors burnt Wishart."

"Why did he stop short of the priesthood?"

"There was a reason—something insurmountable. Many people have talked. He was on his probation in one of the monasteries on the Aventine. Towards the end of his time something happened. I doubt if anyone outside the fraternity really knows. Whether scandal or crime, or whether it was only that latent strain of madness which his superiors discovered, I have never heard. The Church keeps the secrets of her erring sons—even when she repudiates the sinner."

"And Lady Beaumont can still cherish him as a brother?"

"When a woman begins by sacrificing her inclinations at the call of duty or affection—she seldom stops short at anything. Isabel married a rich man for her brother's sake, breaking with a man she loved."

"Ah, then," cried Godwin, "she is not all marble—she can love. Who was the man?"

He had grown paler, and his lips trembled. He ached with jealousy at the thought of that early love.

She could love—she had loved!

"Who was the man?" he repeated huskily.

"He was a soldier. Nobody need be jealous of him. He was killed in America fifteen years ago. But, my dear friend, pray don't forget that you have chosen your lot—that you have a wife, and that Isabel Beaumont's history can have no personal interest for you."

"No personal interest! No—but when one has admired a noble face, and imagined the noble character behind it, one may be allowed to feel deeply."

"Don't feel too deeply. Let there be no playing with fire."

The Duchess rose as she spoke. One of the nephews had come for her.

"I have been sent to look for you," he said. "All sorts of people are coming, and a good many are going."

"I have been too long off duty. You are not to run away, Godwin, till I have taken you to the Duke. He has set his heart upon seeing you. I shall look for you in the garden between five and six."

It was past four, and the garden and the river had their peaceful afternoon aspect. A fragile skiff went by now and then, and a pair of swans sailed slowly between the green slope of the lawn and an eyot where they had their nest among the rushes. It was this rushy eyot—so near as to seem a part of the garden—that had given its name to the villa.

The garden was delicious. Lord Elstree had a passion for roses, and his garden was a rose-garden. New flowers might be introduced with fuss and glorification—flowers of more splendid colouring and longer names. Elstree wanted nothing better than a rose. He would not waste thought or money upon any meaner blossom. And it seemed as if the roses knew, and were grateful: for they grew for him as they grew for nobody else in England. Women gushed and made romantic speeches about his rose-garden; and he smiled as he imagined their horror if he told them with what unclean and foul-smelling nourishment he sometimes fed his lovely favourites.

There were no fountains or marble balustrades in the garden—no sham Italian terrace—no plaster vases. The lawn sloped to the edge of the river. There were arches and labyrinths and beds and hedges of roses—and for only ornament there was an old sundial that had been rescued at the demolition of a convent two hundred years before Lord Elstree bought the homestead that he had made into a villa.

There was a magnificent plane—about which William Pitt had

made some Latin verses—that had been engraved upon a brass plate affixed to the trunk: there were weeping willows along the bank, willows of a hundred years' growth, that dipped their branches in the stream. Each of these made a leafy tent, under which there were garden-seats, and gay-looking chintz-covered arm-chairs brought from the house.

Godwin followed the sound of a waltz, and looked in at the marquee. He stood within the doorway for a few minutes, just long enough to see Fanny waltz past him with a tall stripling for her partner; just long enough to see that she was happy, and that he was not wanted.

Godwin explored the lawn and the rose-gardens, leaving no corner unvisited. He had an aching desire to meet Isabel Beaumont. Isabel. The name seemed of all names the loveliest. He wanted to meet her—and it seemed to him that there could be no peril in such a meeting, now that he was the bond-slave of a foolish marriage, while she was still free. The gulf between them was no longer that of social status only. It was a deeper cleavage; and all thought of difference in rank had vanished with the consciousness of that impassable abyss. He found her at last, seated under one of the willows, with a certain Mrs. Pomfret, a loquacious matron who was nursing an obese but amiable pug, glorified with blue kid harness and silver bells. He had often met this lady, who almost screamed at sight of him, and came bursting out of the shadows to greet him.

"How delightful to meet you here," she said. "Nobody told me. I have been dying to tell you how my husband and I admired your Sir Giles. It was wonderful—your death was almost too dreadful. There were women in hysterics."

"The censor has taken objection to the scene, and I am ordered to be less realistic. I was wrong. Death should be sacred. Tragedy cannot exist without it—but we must not copy nature too closely. One ought to remember that in every audience there may be hearts that ache with old wounds."

Lady Beaumont gave him her hand.

"I hope you have not forgotten me, Mr. Godwin."

No, he had not forgotten. His reply was hardly audible. He was standing bareheaded, looking at the blue and gold of running water in the sunshine; feeling as if he were in the midst of a happy dream—that would vanish presently and leave the world grey.

The Hon. Mrs. Pomfret's loquacity covered his strangeness. She was talking about her dog. Her darling Quince (that was



the pug's name) was dying of thirst ; and she must hurry back to the house to get some water for him.

" I take him with me everywhere," she said, " for the dear love breaks his heart if I leave the house before his bed-time—and I'm afraid he may have had too many nice little bits of chicken while I was at luncheon. He is quite irresistible when he puts his front paws on my knee and snorts."

The pug, who looked as if he were dying by inches of over-feeding, gave a corroborative snort, and the lady bustled off with her pet.

" Let us sit and watch the river, Mr. Godwin, while you tell me about your future plans. I dare say you are studying some new character to follow Sir Giles, making some new experiments among the great Elizabethans—Marlowe, perhaps, or Webster. But you must not think you have exhausted Shakespeare. We want to see you as King John or as Wolsey ; and you must play Iago, whenever they can find you a good Othello."

They were sitting side by side in the glancing lights and shadows, the summer air faintly stirring the light foliage that sheltered them. To-day she was kind, so kind that she seemed hardly the same woman whose coldness had hurt him at their first meeting.

They talked of the plays he had acted in lately—and she showed herself mistress of the subject. She knew those stately Elizabethans by heart, and had her own ideas about them.

" I have always admired that old literature," she said, " the dramatists Charles Lamb loves."

And then, after a silence, she said in her low, grave voice, looking at him with thoughtful eyes :—

" Things have happened since we met in St. James's Square. Your friend the Duchess has been telling me about your marriage. You have married that pretty Miss Fountain, who was such a charming Desdemona—your Ophelia, too. It seems natural that you should be drawn together."

" Such marriages always seem natural," he said dully. Never had he felt so dull and incapable. Her voice soothed him ; the beauty of her face held him like a spell. So calm, so passionless a beauty : light without warmth. He thought of Steele's too-often-quoted compliment to a wife who hardly deserved it—" To love her was a liberal education." He thought that he would be a better man if she would but give him her friendship—nothing more than friendship—nothing warmer—just to be approved and understood by her—and to see and talk to her

now and then, as he was doing to-day. The fact that he had a wife could make no difference. Married or single he could be nothing more to Lady Beaumont than he was to-day, listening respectfully to her thoughts and opinions, worshipping her in a silence never to be broken by an impassioned word.

"Miss Fountain was a loss to the theatre," she said presently ; "but I hope Mrs. Godwin is very happy."

"I do my best to make her so. She has a gay and happy disposition—but I fear she sometimes regrets having left the stage. No one but an actor can know the grip that acting has upon us. I seem unkind sometimes for not wanting her to act any more."

"Is she here to-day ?"

"Yes, she is dancing in the tent yonder. I looked in just now, and saw her radiant in a waltz."

"I have a niece who is dancing. When I go to look for her perhaps you will go with me and introduce me to your wife."

"It will be an honour for us both."

Then came more talk of the Elizabethans, while Godwin kept telling himself that it was of the actor only, the mere exponent of the poetry she liked, that Isabel Beaumont thought, never of the man—and then suddenly she turned to him with a more vivid look in her face, and said :—

"Now tell me something about yourself—how you came to be an actor. That is always the interesting question."

He flushed, and was slow to answer.

"How soon did your vocation declare itself ?"

"As soon as I could read. I may have been eleven years old."

"Such a child ! Then what was your inspiration ? You saw some great actor, perhaps, and that fired you ?"

"I made up my mind to be an actor before I had seen the inside of a theatre."

"Well, but the inspiration, the inspiration ?"

"I read 'Hamlet'—and wanted to act Hamlet."

And then he told her briefly of his strange and happy childhood in the Forest, his mother's devotion, the brown tents, the long summer days of rambling under green boughs, reading and reciting, teaching himself to be an actor, struggling with his own conception of a character, unsatisfied until to his own imagination he could make Hamlet and Othello live. He glanced briefly at his education, and Patrick O'Brien's kindness—the brown tents, the scanty fare, the beloved companion of his infancy, the

dog so cruelly lost. He kept back nothing but the van and the brooms and brushes. He shrank from telling her of that, remembering how shocked Fanny had been, and how the thought of it had rankled, and left a scornful pity at the bottom of her mind, which had revealed itself more than once in some contemptuous allusion to his past—some little speech that showed how she compared him disadvantageously with such men as Arden and Vavasour—the men who had been born rich.

"How romantic!" said Lady Beaumont, with kindling eyes. "It was a fitting childhood for a man whose mission was to make the world in love with Shakespeare. Tell me more about your Forest. You have made me long to know it. I have only seen the skirts of the wood from a post-chaise on the road to Weymouth."

He tried to give her some idea of that adorable world. He tried to paint the beauty of those deep solitudes, those secret glades, where there was no life but of the wild creatures that were free and happy there—the long stretches of moorland—Acres Down—Boldrewood—the changing glories of light and colour that made a new world in every change of the seasons—the purple of the heather—the gold of the dwarf furze—the white world of winter—the red and gold of autumn—and the fairy world of tremulous young leaves—of primrose and violet in April, when the frail white bloom of the blackthorn foreshadowed the hawthorn's summer splendour. He told her how under the green roof of spreading beech boughs the primroses grew so thickly that all the ground as far as one could see was pale gold—while the blue of the dog-violets, peeping here and there, was a blue that nothing else could show under the April sky. It seemed just the reflection of that heavenly azure—too clear, too lovely, for earth.

"The wild hyacinths come later," he said, "like spreading lakes of blue water under the young oaks, while the oak-leaves are still yellow, and the light still shines through them. And then there is the Forest river—winding through the mysteries of the wood. Forgive me, Lady Beaumont. I rave when I think of that Forest, and all the dreams I dreamt there."

"And your dream has come to pass. You are more fortunate than most people."

"Fate has been kind," he said with a faint sigh. "If I had never acted Hamlet, if I had never forced my way to that great theatre, I should have died broken-hearted. And yet, having got there, I sometimes ask myself what is a man the better for

acting Hamlet—what is the world better for the existence of a stage-player ? ”

Lady Beaumont replied almost as O'Brien had done to the same question. She was kind, and she told Godwin that the man who can give life and form to the genius of a great poet—who can make wit and poetry live, and sublime thoughts and happy fancies easy of understanding to the multitude, is a benefactor to his race, and only on a lower plane than the poet.

“ If I dared to think I was of some use——”

“ You have every right to think so. Is there one of those rough creatures in the shilling gallery who would sit by his fire and read Shakespeare ? Shakespeare unacted is dead. The book stands upon the shelf in the dust of years, waiting for the magician's wand.”

“ You are kind. I try to believe that the theatre does a noble work ; but when I think of the men who have acted there—the great plays—the noble poetry : and remember that the ‘ Cataract of the Ganges ’ filled the house as well as George Frederick Cooke as Richard, I feel how poor a thing an actor's popularity is. And then I measure myself against men like Canning, like Wellington, like Nelson and Collingwood, the men whom the world cannot do without—the men who do great things instead of dreaming them ; and I feel that I am of no more account in the world than the child in Wordsworth's ode shaping his dream of human life with pencil and paper.”

“ You are ungrateful to the gods who have given you your desire,” Lady Beaumont said, smiling rather sadly.

“ Nought's had, all's spent,” he began.

“ When our desire is got without content.”

She finished the quotation, as she rose, and moved out of the shadow of the willow into the sunlit path.

Perhaps it had been in her mind as often as in his ; in those older years that so often bring disillusion, and the unhappy habit of looking back.

“ We had better go and find the dancers,” she said, and she and Godwin walked side by side to the tent.

Fanny met her husband at the door. The band was still playing—but the company had dwindled. She had had no partner for the last waltz, and no one had claimed her for the country-dance for which couples were gathering. She had been waiting ; and she looked tired, and somewhat forlorn.

“ What have you been doing with yourself all this immense time ? ” she asked.

"Half an hour. I was here half an hour ago, and you were waltzing."

"Half an hour is a long time at an afternoon dance. Everybody is going. I didn't want to be the last living creature in the tent."

"I see twenty couples."

"I feel one of my headaches coming on."

"Stop it by an exercise of will. Lady Beaumont wishes me to introduce you to her."

"Lady Beaumont!" Fanny started and frowned. "Have you been with her all the time?"

"Most of the time."

Lady Beaumont had been talking with her niece out of ear-shot. She was close to them now, as she and her charge moved towards the door; and Godwin introduced his wife, who dropped the most ceremonious of curtsies, and seemed surprised when the elder lady shook hands with her.

"I am very pleased to meet you in the common light of day, Mrs. Godwin. I have known you and admired you across the footlights."

"Oh, I have done with the lights now. George won't let me act any more."

"And you miss the glamour of the stage?"

"If I had known how much I should miss it, I should never have married. An actor's wife ought never to leave the stage till her husband does."

"If you take your retirement so sadly I dare say Mr. Godwin will end by letting you have your way."

"Oh, you don't know what an iron will he has, Lady Beaumont. But perhaps if you take my part he will give way."

"Wait till I know you both better. He and I have only met once before to-day."

The gay music had been going on all the time—an inspiring melody from the "Beggar's Opera"—but the country-dance had not come off. People wanted to get away—and there were selfish inquiries about carriages on every side. How were people to find their carriages in such a mob, and where was the soup or the tea that was to sustain them for the drive to London? Godwin and his wife saw no more of Lady Beaumont or her niece, who were parted from them in the crowd, and when Fanny had been comforted with tea in one of the pretty parlours opening on the lawn, they went to take leave of the Duchess, who was at her post in the porch, saying unceasing good-byes, and being thanked by



everybody almost in the same words, for a most enchanting party.

"You did not send for me," Godwin said, "so may I ride down to-morrow or next day to see the Duke?"

"Yes, come either day. Come and dine, if you are free."

"I am acting both nights."

"Then come early in the afternoon, and we will sit in the garden and talk."

Godwin and Fanny had a long way to walk on a rural road between hedges starred with dog-roses and scented with honeysuckle, before they found their carriage in the double row of vehicles that filled the road, and Fanny grumbled all the way. Her feet were tired after so many waltzes, and her shoes were hurting her. The headache had developed from a threat into a racking reality.

"It was the heat of that horrid marquee," she complained. "You ought not to have left me there all that time. But you were happy with your Lady Beaumont."

Godwin was busy looking for the carriage, and did not answer.

"She is not half so handsome as she was on the first night of 'Othello.' She has aged, and her gown could not have cost ten pounds."

Godwin had found the carriage. He seated himself by his wife in silence—a silence unbroken till they were half-way to London.

There had come into Godwin's mind that foolish saying of the country actors when they did not know their words, and the play was going badly:—

"Never mind, 'twelve o'clock must come at last.'"

It was the fatalist's creed in a sentence. The audience would vanish. The lights would go out. The green curtain must fall. Death must come. Nothing matters.

The world was changed for him; it had become a world lit with hope, although he knew it was a world in which he could never know the best that life can give. The supreme good was not for him. He had set a barrier between himself and perfect love when he married Fanny Fountain. Perfect love, the love of man and wife who are of one heart and mind, could never be his. Moved by a profound tenderness, by a passion of pity, he had married the woman who loved him—only because she loved him, for no other charm, for no other virtue. And after half a year's wedlock he had discovered how poor a thing that facile love was—passion without constancy: ardour without

strength. She was tired of him, yet fiercely jealous. She was cold and indifferent to the art he lived for, and she had no pride in his success, no sympathy with his ambitions. She compared him disadvantageously with the fine gentlemen whose elegant inanity bore the stamp of fashion.

And she was to be his lifelong companion. To keep her happy and to improve her mind, to guide those wayward feet in the path of virtue, must be his chief care in life: before even that development of his power which was needful in a profession where not to advance might be to fail. But in the midst of bitter thoughts he told himself that the world was changed. Half an hour, sitting in sun and shadow, hearing the low, sweet speech that harmonised with the murmur of running waters, had changed his world. Isabel Beaumont had been kind, so kind, so frankly interested in his career and in himself, that he now felt secure of her friendship. And her friendship could change his world. To be worthy of her would make life worth living. Her interest in his career, her thoughtful eyes watching him, would be a stimulus to prevent depression, and to revive his enthusiasm for the art of which he was beginning to be weary. He would no longer ask if the actor's craft were worthy of a man. It was enough that she thought it worthy.

He would go back to his dream-world, the dream-world where she could follow him. He would work with new fervour to please her. He would revive old plays that she wanted to see. He would dig forgotten playwrights out of their graves, because she had praised them. He would put life into the dry bones—make daring curves from the dull straight line, the beaten track of the stage-player. He would make the public admire what she admired. She should be his secret Egeria, his perpetual inspiration.

"My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne." That line sang itself to the rhythm of his horse's hoofs as he rode by green meadows and blue water, past that white villa which was to be the scene of a nation's loss a few years later, when Canning came there to die. He was steeped in the sweetness of the summer air, the prettiness of the pastoral landscape, the charm of that delicious river. In a word, he was happy.

The Duchess saw the change in him.

"What has happened to you?" she asked. "You look ten years younger than you were last week."

"Your party was delightful, better than a tonic. And I see

every vestige of the fête has vanished. You are a wonderful woman."

"I had some wonderful workmen. You will see The Rushes at its best now all that trumpery is swept away. The Duke is enjoying this exquisite day in the garden. Come and sit with us, and we will give you a dish of tea at half-past four. I keep invalid's hours here, and dine with my dear old man at one o'clock. Primitive and rustic, and the way to live long; for one cannot eat or drink much at that hour—and I do nothing after dinner but read Scott's last novel to him, or moon about the garden. Your horse shall be fed and taken care of."

She gave her orders. A groom had appeared at sound of hoofs on the carriage-drive, and Godwin's handsome grey, with a dash of Arabian blood in her, was conducted to stables in the rear of the shrubbery.

The Duchess led the way to the lawn, strolling slowly.

"Then you liked my party?"

"Immensely."

"Your wife was much admired. Angus McLeod was enchanted. Her dancing was perfection, and so was her figure—such a waist, such shoulders! He would not believe that she could be more than twenty. You ought to be proud of her."

"I am proud to hear she was admired. She told me that Lord Angus was a delightful partner. It was a privilege to waltz with him."

"Oh, his Vienna training stands him in good stead. And you," looking at him rather searchingly—"Did you dance?"

"That is not my line."

"Then how did you amuse yourself? Did you meet Lady Beaumont?"

"Yes, I sat under that tree yonder, talking with her."

"And did she offend you? Was she distant and disagreeable?"

"No, she was kind. We talked as friends talk, with open heart. I shall never call her disagreeable again. I hope that I have won her friendship."

He would keep nothing back from Ursula Pentland. She had a right to know his mind. There was nothing that he need be afraid to tell her—no taint of sin—no unholy hope. He met her earnest gaze with candid eyes, smiling at her seriousness.

"Oh, Godwin," she said in a low voice, "be careful. The peace of two hearts may be in jeopardy."

"Dear Duchess, do you suppose there can be no such thing as friendship between a pure woman and an honest man?"

"No. If the man is seventy and the woman seventeen, or if the woman is sixty-five and the man seven-and-twenty, as in our case, I believe they may be very good friends."

"If you say that friendship is impossible when both are young—is there no middle state, love without sensuality, a noble affection that has never been degraded by passion?"

"No, I do not believe in your middle state. Shakespeare, who has sounded every note in the gamut of feeling, has pictured no such friendship."

"Because it would not be dramatic. Calm and sinless creatures are no use for the stage."

They had come to the Duke's little camp—the willow under which Godwin had sat with Isabel Beaumont. The Duke had all his invalid luxuries, including his collie dog, and his faithful valet, seated on a camp-stool by his master's easy chair, reading a savage article in the "Chronicle," which the Duke heard with approving chuckles. The servant laid down the newspaper and retired as the Duchess drew near, and reappeared a quarter of an hour later, followed by footmen who brought the tea-table.

Godwin sat there for an hour in the golden light, telling the Duke all the news of the theatre.

"You have made their fortune," the kind old man said. "The shareholders ought to be very fond of you. Lady Beaumont, for instance. Her husband subscribed ten thousand pounds to the new theatre—not so much as poor Whitbred put into it. They say his loss had something to do with his miserable end—that honest, warm-hearted, impracticable fellow—too good for the age he lived in."

The collie laid his handsome head on Godwin's knee.

"Wally has taken a fancy to you," the Duchess told him. "Isn't he a lovely creature? He was a gift from Sir Walter—the world's one Walter."

"And how is Hector?" asked the Duke. "Still in favour, I hope?"

"In favour? He is my closest friend."

"And does Mrs. Godwin tolerate him?"

"Oh, they are on the best of terms now—though he was inclined to take objection to her at first. He suffers her now, and likes to lie on the skirt of her gown when it is silk or velvet. He objects to any coarser material; and he growls if she moves when he is comfortable."

"I thought she would be kind to him. She looks very sweet and gentle," said the Duchess.

"A douce lassie," said the Duke.

It was not of the "douce lassie" that Godwin was thinking, as he rode by the river-meadows where rising mists were spreading a pale grey veil over the summer green. It was of another face, less bright in colouring, with less of everyday prettiness than Fanny Fountain's, a finely chiselled face, pale and calm, a broad forehead over which the dark hair was parted smoothly, strongly marked eyebrows, and grave grey eyes. That other face went with him through all the quiet country ride, and only vanished in the traffic of the great Bath road, when he had passed the "Half-way House," and the smoke canopy of London veiled the summer sky.

Was friendship impossible? A thousand times no! He challenged Fate. If Isabel Beaumont would be his friend, it would be the business of his life to prove how loyal a man's love can be—when honour bars the way. He would prove that a man may be a kind husband to a wife he does not love; and a devoted friend to a woman he dare not love. He would prove that affection may be deep and constant without passion—light without fire. He had heard of Chateaubriand and Mme. Recamier: supreme beauty and supreme intelligence! He had read of Petrarch and Laura.

That sunlit hour under drooping boughs on the edge of blue water seemed a far-off memory before Godwin again had speech with Isabel Beaumont. But he saw her almost every time he acted. She had come back into his dream-life, and made it beautiful. That heart-sickness which had damped his ardour was no more. The keen delight in his art that had made familiar things always new was again his. He no longer asked himself whether the actor's profession was worthy or ignoble. His belief in the dignity of his art was as strong as in the days when he acted Richard to a handful of rustics in a windy barn, and felt as if the blood of the Plantagenets was throbbing in his pulses. He had his dream again.

He did not often look up at the box where he knew she was sitting. He felt those steadfast eyes watching him. It was enough to have seen her once, motionless as a statue, her elbow on the crimson cushion, her chin resting on her hand, her arm white as marble below the puffed satin sleeve. Her presence in-



spired him—and the storm of applause that rewarded something original and spontaneous in a familiar passage of the play, was due to her influence.

In comedy as in tragedy, that influence lifted him to a higher level. The music of his laugh, the flashes of joy, the spirit that gave double power to wit or sarcasm, the tenderness that lent a new charm to pathos, were all her work. It was because she was there, because her nightly presence assured him of her regard, that he trod on air, and moved and breathed in a world of delicious dreams.

Eminent people praised him for the growing power of his genius, and talked about his "magnetism."

"There must be something in your veins that other actors have not," Samuel Rogers told him. "A divine ichor. When you are acting you are a son of the gods, and I begin to wonder whether I ought to ask you to one of my breakfasts, unless I can promise you to meet some of the Immortals to whose company you belong. Byron and Moore are mere poets—but you are the magician who can make poetry live. Byron tells me he is writing a tragedy for you."

"I am honoured by a single thought from that splendid mind," Godwin said. He had waived aside the banker-poet's exaggerated compliments with a smile.

Sometimes even amidst his recovered delight in his art there came an aching desire to have speech with his Egeria—and it was when his longing had become too sharp a pain that he was made suddenly happy by a letter from the lady of his dreams.

"No. 50 SPRING GARDENS,

*"Thursday Night.*

"Dear Mr. Godwin,

"I have seen you often in the theatre since our meeting at Chiswick—but it seems a long time since we were talking of the old dramatists. When I am in London I spend my Sunday evenings at home, and my intimate friends have a habit of wasting an idle hour with me on that evening. Will you come next Sunday, if you are free? My friends all know you in the theatre; and they would like to see you in the quiet of my drawing-room. I know I should.

"I need not say that I shall be charmed if Mrs. Godwin will come with you.

"Yours sincerely,

"ISABEL BEAUMONT."

He had been wondering what happy turn of Fortune's wheel would bring them together—not presuming to imagine that anything except chance could give him her society—and here were seven blessed lines in her own hand, admitting him to the paradise he had been longing for.

This was friendship! She did verily wish to make him her friend. She was not afraid to hold out her hand to him. No thought of playing with fire had entered that pure mind.

He gave Fanny the letter to read; her letter, over which he had brooded, studying every characteristic of penmanship, so careless, yet so firm—so decided, yet so womanly; not mock masculine, but strong feminine. He stood waiting for Fanny to give him back the letter. She had a provoking air of not meaning to return it.

"Oh, do you want her letter?" she asked. "There it is—a horrid commercial hand. One would think she had learnt to write in a counting-house."

"Will you come to her party, next Sunday?"

"Jessie Vernon has asked me to go up the river—and take tea in the garden of that rustic inn on Kew Green. Her mamma and her brother are going, and he is taking one of his Oxford friends. They are to have a large open carriage, and I have accepted a seat in it. One of the young men will go on the box."

"I thought you did not like Miss Vernon."

"I don't like her when she is acting with you, in a part I ought to be playing, and should be if you were not too much wrapped up in yourself ever to think of what is due to me," Fanny said, with an angry sparkle in her eyes.

She had a way of breaking out suddenly upon some question that her husband had thought settled and done with ever so long ago. A quarrel with her was like a furnace in the iron country—the fire was never allowed to go out.

"If you think it due to you that I should beg Harvey to re-engage you at the theatre you left of your own accord, declaring you would never re-enter it, I can only say that your idea of personal dignity and mine are different"; and then in his grave voice he said, "My dear girl, why are you so unjust to me? Is quarrelling with your husband a necessity of your existence? One would think so, for it needs so light a spark to set you on fire."

She gave him back the letter, and watched him fold it, and slip it into his breast-pocket. The thing might be done automatically, but Fanny did not think so.

"I don't want to quarrel," she said, "but I am not going to Lady Beaumont's party, although she condescends to say I may. I suppose you have no objection to urge against Miss Vernon and her mamma."

"Or her company? I suppose not. Her brother is an undergraduate at Corpus, which is a scholarly college, so I conclude that he and his friend are gentlemen."

The domestic sky was unclouded for the rest of the week. Fanny went singing about the house, warbling snatches of airy music, "Should he upbraid" or "Come unto these yellow sands," not those wild Ophelia wailings with which she startled the echoes, when smarting under the sense of wrong.

The new week began. Godwin spent Sunday afternoon in a long ramble with Hector—through Hampstead, and Caen Wood, over ground full of august memories. In that house yonder the Great Commoner had shut his door against the world, and had sat brooding there, racked with gout, in a tragic isolation; angry, and as some said, demented. Godwin loved this rural world above London, the sandy hills, the fir trees, and the heather—things that reminded him of the Forest. He loved these long rambles almost as much as Hector did, who gambolled in exuberant delight. He had excused himself from a dinner-party at which he would have met men of absolute distinction, the men whose work in life he had taken to measuring against his own—with a humiliating sense of difference.

It would have been easy for him to have dined and gone to Lady Beaumont's, after dinner. He had done that often enough—dining at Bayswater House, and going on to Lady Guernsey's political party, to hear history in the making; but this afternoon he wanted solitude, and to watch the sunset from Highgate Hill.

He went back to Bedford Square only in time to dress, and to take a cup of tea with his mother, who told him how Fanny had gone off happy and smiling in a landau with the pretty actress and her mamma, and two young men, one of whom looked like a poet.

"She had a new gown—pale blue muslin—and a black satin scarf—very becoming."

"She is always having new gowns. I seem never to see her twice in the same finery."

"I hope she is not spending too much of your money, dear."

"A muslin gown can't cost much. Why should I stint her while I have plenty? I like her to spend and be happy."

"She ought to be happy with such a husband."

"I shall be home before midnight, mother, and you may give me some supper."

"Do you mean that you have had no dinner?"

"Oh, I believe Hector and I had mutton-chops at Jack Straw's—but we both thought a great deal more of the furze bushes and the sand-hills than of our dinner. It is such bliss to get quite away from London."

## CHAPTER XXIII

HALF an hour later he was in Lady Beaumont's drawing-room, where he found about a dozen people, three men of mature age, two of whom were known to him as lesser lights in the political world, and staunch adherents of Canning—two or three youngish men, whom he took to be musical, literary, or artistic, and, for the rest of the company, women old and young, but all with a certain air of the great world. He was not among strangers, and was welcomed effusively by the politicians, and by old Mrs. Belfield, a close friend of the Duchess of Pentland. It was curious to note Godwin's attractiveness for elderly women. They were his most devoted admirers. He brought an element of romance into lives that had long passed the romantic age. One other figure struck him, as he moved from friend to friend, exchanging greetings—a darkling shape, in the embrasure of a window—half shrouded by voluminous curtains that drooped on either side of him. The summer twilight glimmered pale and grey behind him, for the window was wide open, and the last of the daylight mixed with the golden light from clusters of wax candles in sconces and chandelier.

Godwin divined rather than saw the face in deep shadow, and knew that it was Isabel Beaumont's brother who sat aloof from her guests: an unpropitious figure, dark as the story of his youth.

Godwin slipped into an empty chair by Mrs. Belfield, and near the round table at which Lady Beaumont was making tea, assisted by Miss Montgomery—the niece whom Godwin had seen dancing at Chiswick, and who went about carrying teacups to those guests of graver age who might allow themselves to be waited upon by a flaxen-haired girl of seventeen. The younger men gathered near the table, and wanted to help with the tea-cups, but were not allowed.

"No, no," Lady Beaumont said. "Cups and saucers are a woman's business. We leave bottles and tankards, and the knowledge of wines, to you; but when it comes to tea, we are the connoisseurs. Please put down that cup, Mr.



Elliot, which nobody wants, and be kind, and play something for us."

Mr. Elliot, whom Godwin had marked for a musician—on the strength of a large forehead, dreamy eyes, and a neckcloth that could be nothing but artistic—bowed and obeyed. He went to the piano—a small grand by Broadwood—and tinkled through a sonata of Mozart's, with seven variations, a minuet, and a Turkish march; while the company grouped themselves into friendly knots of two and three, and talked—loud or low as manners or want of manners would have it. Harry Elliot loved playing, and was used to not being listened to. He could play on contentedly in a ripple of talk, with occasional bursts of laughter; and Lady Beaumont was too wise to go about among her guests, hushing them to silence. They came to her house to talk; and she gave them no music that need stop conversation. Sometimes she would go and sit by the piano, the only listener, to let her friend see that somebody was enjoying his music; but to-night she stopped near the tea-table and talked to Godwin. Their voices were low and grave, and they had to draw their chairs closer to hear each other, amid the buzz of conversation and the tinkling of triplets and arpeggios. Mrs. Belfield put in a word, or was appealed to by Lady Beaumont now and then: otherwise their talk was a *tête-à-tête*.

Godwin admired the room.

"It is unlike any other drawing-room I have seen," he said.

"Because it is emptier than most rooms. People collect curios and old china, and crowd their rooms, till there is not a square yard of space for a visitor. I have remembered that I want room for my friends, rather than pretty things to look at. My china is yonder, behind glass"—indicating two large buhl cabinets in recesses on either side of the fireplace—"and I have my walls for the rest of my treasures."

The walls were sea-green silk, like the window-curtains, and a single picture in each panel was the only decoration—a child playing with a goat, by Reynolds; a landscape, by Gainsborough; a water-mill and meadows, by Constable; and a girl with a dove, by Greuze. There was a second drawing-room, dimly lighted, and seen vaguely through an archway. The sea-green walls, the Adam ceiling, doors, and fireplace, and that suggestion of precious china in cabinets that were themselves of inestimable value, made up an ensemble of subdued beauty, that seemed to express all that was most exquisite in the mistress of the house.

Godwin's thoughts reverted involuntarily to another drawing-

room—the room in that bijou house in Hertford Street—bijou standing for cramped and inconvenient—the house which had become an ugly spot in his memory. He could not shut out the picture of Fanny's drawing-room—the Chinese screen, and the Louis Quatorze sofa, with its bloated gilt legs, and sham Gobelins tapestry—the Empire table—and the Venetian chairs, the statuettes, the Dresden shepherdesses, the huge Nankin jars that suggested the superior tea-dealer's shop; a room where it was difficult to move without knocking over a coffee-table, or endangering an alabaster goddess. In each case the room seemed to him typical of the mind that had created it. Here serene and spacious, no discord in colour, no eccentricity in form—yonder, confused and crowded, a patchwork of expensive things that were all out of place—like Fanny's mind, full of restless thoughts, and unsatisfied desires.

Towards eleven Lady Beaumont's visitors began to leave, and she was occupied with adieux. Her brother came out of his retreat in the shadow of the sea-green curtains, and talked to some of the departing guests.

"Where have you been hiding yourself, Malcolm?" his sister asked.

"I have been listening to the music, and enjoying my own thoughts. Nobody wanted me."

"I wanted you—to introduce you to Mr. Godwin."

"Didn't you do that once before?" asked her brother, favouring the actor with a stiff bow.

"If I did, you seem to have forgotten."

"I have not forgotten that honour—or Mr. Godwin. Everybody talks of Mr. Godwin. One can hardly open a newspaper without seeing his name."

"It is the actor's misfortune that for him fame is only another word for publicity," said Godwin, who declined to be offended. "His best success is ephemeral, and he ceases to exist when people leave off talking about him."

"Not if he has created haunting images that live in the minds of his audience long after the fall of the curtain," Lady Beaumont said in her low voice.

"Ephemeral! I will not hear such a word about fine acting," exclaimed Mrs. Belfield. "Garrick has been dead a great many years; yet I have a few old friends who are never tired of talking of him."

"We will talk of Mr. Godwin when he is dead," said Malcolm, as he turned and crept back to his seat in the window.

"My brother makes a hermit's cave wherever he is," said Lady Beaumont to Godwin. "You must not think unkindly of him," as she gave him her hand. "Come and see me again."

"May I?"

"Yes. We have not finished our discussion—and I want to have the best of the argument."

"Then I will come and fight to the death. Must it be on a Sunday?"

"No. I am generally at home in the evening."

"Then I will take my chance at nine o'clock—soon."

He held her hand just a moment longer than he ought to have done, and their eyes met as he released it—hers soft and serious, his with something of the vivid light that made his stage face wonderful.

He walked on air when he left her. They were friends. She had given him every sign of friendship. Her interest in his conversation. Her almost exclusive attention. Her permission for future visits—indefinite—suggesting that her door would be always open for him—that she could not see him too often. He spent the last hour of the night, and the first hour of the day, in one of his objectless rambles, forgetting that he had promised his mother to be home early; and all was silence and darkness when he let himself into his hall, where Hector's quick bark from the upper floor—the bark of recognition—was his only welcome.

Without one unholy thought, he was inexpressibly happy—but his dreams that night were dreadful. They were of Malcolm Crawford, the gloomy fanatic—a threatening figure, following his sister with hatred in his eyes. Waking brought him no relief from that dream, for the more he thought of the brooding face in the shadow, the more horrible it seemed to him that Isabel Beaumont's life should be spent with this sinister companion—that she should live under the same roof with that dark spirit, whose gloomy temper might at any hour develop into melancholia—or even homicidal madness. He recalled all the stories he had ever heard of criminal lunacy—the madman who was considered harmless, a sad and gentle creature moving quietly about the house among relations who were sorry for him, and trusted him, and who, in an hour, became transformed into a murderer, killing the friend he loved best in the world.

He told himself that Isabel Beaumont was running this risk every hour of her life. Oh, that he had been really her friend,

with power to stand between her and danger ; with the right to advise, and to insist upon his advice being acted upon ! He hoped that in the days to come their friendship might reach that point ; but in the meantime there was the daily peril. Crawford's countenance haunted him. So profoundly sad when in repose, and so malignant when the dull grey eyes met his.

He had no rehearsal on Monday—and Fanny was shut in her room with her special headache, the usual conclusion to any exceptional gaiety—so he had his day to himself. He set out upon a country ramble with Hector, meaning to walk through the meadows by Willesden, and to cross the crest of Dolly's Hill to Edgware—but before he came to the farm on the hill, he turned suddenly, and struck into the coach road to London. That haunting face—the face in the dream—was driving him back. He must talk to someone who could understand his fear, and who might help him. The Duchess of Pentland was the only friend whose sympathy could be more than empty speech.

He got a seat at the back of the Edgware stage, where Hector accommodated himself between his master's legs, and surveyed the humours of the road with a lively interest—barking at wagoners perched high on their wains, as if they were his hereditary enemies.

Godwin had left home earlier than usual that morning—for the hours after his bad dream had been sleepless. It was early in the afternoon when the coach dropped him and his dog at the "Green Man," and it was only two o'clock when he got to the "Half-way House," on the other side of Hyde Park, where he waited for the Brentford coach.

The Rushes looked as slumberous as the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, when Godwin and Hector arrived in the rose-covered porch, dog and man covered with dust.

Her grace was in the garden, where her unexpected visitors found her, with the Duke's black-and-tan collie lying on her gown, whereby the first quarter of an hour of Godwin's visit was mostly occupied in reconciling the two dogs to each other's existence, a matter of coaxing and threatening from the Duchess and her visitor, and a final recourse to the footman, who led the collie back to the house, and left his wiry-haired countryman master of the scene.

"I have brought Hector to see you," Godwin said, when quiet was restored. "You were kind enough to inquire about him the other day—so I thought I would let you see that the dear

beast has not been neglected—except his manners—of which I am deeply ashamed. His conduct in human company is perfect—but he has a blood feud with his own kind.”

“ I am very glad to see your dog—but that was not all, Godwin. You are covered with the dust of the road. Did you walk from London ? ”

“ No, Duchess ; but I walked half the way to Edgware before I changed my mind and made for the Brentford coach.”

“ What is amiss ? ”

“ I have come to plague you with my troubles. I was at Lady Beaumont’s party last night.”

“ Why did you go there ? ”

“ She was kind enough to ask me.”

“ She would not have done that if she had known that you are over head and ears in love with her.”

“ Does that matter ? There must be many others in my condition—perhaps every one of those men I met last night. How can they know her and not love her ? But they possess their souls in patience, and no harm comes of it.”

“ You ought not to have gone to her house. Was it fair to your wife ? ”

“ My wife was invited, and did not choose to go.”

“ Perhaps she knows what I know, poor pretty soul.”

“ If she knows she does not care.”

“ Godwin, you are playing with fire.”

“ If I am, the fire shall not touch your friend. I may be burnt to ashes, but she shall not suffer—she shall be unscathed. I will be her friend, I tell you, Duchess, her true and loyal friend. Nothing else. I defy Fate. She has offered me her friendship, and I mean to be her friend. I have no low desires—no sneaking hopes—I know my own heart, and I defy Fate.”

“ No man can do that with impunity. She may be safe, for she has a cold nature, and she can afford to amuse herself with a platonic attachment at your expense. You will be the sufferer—for you have a soul of fire.”

“ It will be divine suffering—and I had rather be miserable that way—than know any other happiness.”

“ And your wife ? ”

“ For God’s sake forget her. She will never know ill-usage or unkindness—but there can be no more pretence of love between Fanny Fountain and me.”

“ Why do you call her by her maiden name ? ”



"Because our marriage was a mistake. It has made neither of us happy, and it came to an end some time ago."

And then he told the Duchess his trouble—the trouble that had begun in his dream. His friend was grave and thoughtful, and gave him all her attention.

"You imagine dangers that may never arise," she said. "Our lives are darkened by the fear of horrors that do not happen. Yet, I grant that there is something sinister in that young man. Nobody has ever called him mad. Indeed, we all give him credit for a keen intellect, but we none of us like him. The monks did not like him. They want piety, fervour, a strong faith, but they don't want fanaticism. Perhaps they have found out the harm it does. There must have been something—something secret and unpardonable—that cut him off from the priesthood. It may be a suspicion of madness. They would not admit a man of unsound mind to holy orders, even though he were twice a saint."

"And is it right that Isabel Beaumont should live alone with a man suspected of madness?"

"No, I don't think it wise that she should share her home with so dismal a companion; and I have told her so. But nothing will move her. She thinks herself responsible for Malcolm's happiness. She considers him the victim of a tyrannical brotherhood, men who, for reasons that were never revealed, excluded him from the only life for which he was fitted. She takes his fanaticism for religion, and thinks him a martyr. It is hopeless to argue with a woman whose affections are so deeply engaged. She has no other near relation. She and Malcolm were the last of a vanishing race."

"There is the niece I saw here the other day."

"Not of her blood—the child of her husband's sister."

"You mean that Lady Beaumont has only that brother?"

"Only him—and she loves him."

"Then there is nothing to be done?"

"Nothing—except for her to marry. No husband would endure that gloomy presence in his house."

"I think not," Godwin said with a sigh.

The remedy was obvious—marriage would give her the only possible protector. And with her marriage that ideal friendship—that union of mind and heart which had just begun—must come to an end.

After this there was no more to be said. The Duchess took him into the house, and he sat for half an hour with the Duke,

and then went back to London, walking half the way, till the coach picked him up near Hammersmith.

He dined with Fanny and his mother, who had waited dinner for nearly an hour.

"Where have you been, and what have you been doing?" his wife asked fretfully.

He shrugged his shoulders—a long ramble with Hector. The day had been fine, and he had made the most of it. He said no word of Chiswick. If he had spoken of his visit to the Duchess she would have wanted to know why he went there, and what they had talked about. His married life had come to be a life apart from his wife.

"I am sorry I am so late for dinner," he said. "I ought not to have kept you and mother waiting."

His mother smiled at him, as she helped the soup. "You ought not to have walked so long," she said. "How are you to be in high spirits as Benedick after such a tiring day?"

"Benedick must find his good spirits in the stage-lights."

Fanny had her proper place at the head of the table, but it was Mrs. Merritt who carved, and attended to everybody's comfort. Fanny liked to be important, but did not like doing anything that was troublesome. Things to be worth doing must be amusing and exciting, and not the same every day.

"You have told us nothing about your tea-party at Kew," Godwin said to his wife, by way of kindness.

"It was delightful. We went on the river. Young Thompson and the other Oxonian are splendid oarsmen. Jessie Vernon's real name is Thompson, you know. They rowed us to Hampton Bridge, and we went to peep at the Palace—only the walls and towers. It is not open on Sundays. I had not been there since our wedding-day. That wet, shivery day!"

She gave a little shudder as she spoke, as at the memory of something unpleasant. Godwin felt a sudden heartache. But for that day he might have been something more than Isabel's friend. He might have been her suitor, her husband, her authorised protector from every danger.

When he married Fanny Fountain he had despaired of ever being anything more to that other woman than the stage-player—the man to be looked at from a distance, with a scornful unconcern—only a mountebank, paid to amuse her. Had he known that she could be kind—had he even cherished some faint hope of her kindness, there would have been no March wedding-day for Fanny.

Benedick showed no sign of carking care. Benedick was on fire with life. He was the Italian courtier in Italy's most exquisite age—satirical, impertinent, yet with a touch of subdued tenderness—love unborn, but soon to blossom into life—love of which the lover was still unconscious—slumbering love, that had to be awakened by a trick.

His Beatrice was charming. They had acted those buoyant creatures often together, and Jessie Vernon had caught the spirit of the scene from the actor whom critics called inspired. The house was full, and the audience was enthusiastic. Miss Vernon came into the green-room at the end of the third act, pleased with herself and with the public, but Godwin was sitting silent and thoughtful among the other actors.

She walked to the looking-glass, arranged the folds of her train, and admired her stage diamonds, and then seated herself in the chair nearest Godwin.

"How grave you look! You have your Hamlet face. How can you change so quickly from gay to gloomy? I hope your wife is not ill—she complained of a headache last night when we parted. We had a rattling day—but perhaps it was too much for her."

"She enjoyed herself immensely. Your brother and his friend were so kind in taking her on the river. She loves the river."

"So do I. My brother is never happier than when he has a pair of sculls in his hands—and your wife's friend, Colonel Arden, rowed by no means badly, though he did not look like an oarsman. He pretended he had not done any rowing since he was at Eton—which must have been at least thirty years ago. Pure romance, of course. The Prince's set get the habit of romancing from their royal master."

"I did not know that Colonel Arden was to be of your party."

"He was not of my party. He was an agreeable surprise. He had been to see one of the Prince's sisters at the Palace, and happened to be crossing the Green as our carriages drove up to the inn. Fanny and he were surprised at the rencontre."

"Greatly surprised, I have no doubt."

"He is quite charming. He has the grand manner, or perhaps I should say the Prince's manner before he was Regent."

She prattled on, unconscious that Godwin was not listening.

So, she had deceived him, that fair wife of his—whose smile had an infantine simplicity, and who could always make him

believe a lie. She had told Arden where she was going, and at what hour to look for her.

Miss Vernon ran on gaily, expatiating upon the delight of that sunny voyage from Kew to Hampton—the fun—the laughter—the lively personalities flung from boat to boat.

“My brother Ted is a wit in his way, and so is young Dartnell of Christ Church. Undergrads have sharp tongues. I think Colonel Arden found his match in those two.”

She described her tea-party in the garden of the inn, the fine old-fashioned garden of days when land was not bought by the square foot and taxed by the square inch—in the days when an innkeeper was not treated as a public enemy, and might have his garden for people to take their pleasure in, even if more people wanted wine or ale than bohea. Miss Vernon enlarged on the delights of her party, and how that amusing wretch, Arden, drove home with them, sitting bodkin in the roomy carriage, and providing the undergrads with choice cigars—the Regent’s favourite Havanas.

“Neither Fanny nor I mind smoke,” she said.

She did not stop talking till the act-drop went up, and everybody was leaving the green-room for the great scene in the church.

“You did not tell me that Colonel Arden was of your river-party,” Godwin said to Fanny next day, with that casual air which the suspicious husband assumes in such cases.

“Didn’t I?” asked Fanny, who was just as casual. “I thought I had told you and mother all about the party. He wasn’t as good at sculling as the Oxonian, though he thought he was, and it was all he could do to keep our boat level with the other.”

What was to be said or to be done? She sat smiling at him across the breakfast-table. Mrs. Merritt had gone out on her morning business as caterer, and they were alone. Presently, as he sat silent, and with a brooding face, his wife began to sing, “I’d be a butterfly,” *sotto voce*, still smiling at him. The light song suited her light voice. She looked fresh and fair in her morning toilet, all white muslin and lace and blue ribbon. She looked the picture of innocent girlhood—not thirty, but eighteen.

What could he say, what could he do, what could he think?

Certainly the meeting with Arden might have been accidental; but it was strange that he should have been at Kew early on a Sunday afternoon, he who was addicted to London clubs, rather than village greens. From his knowledge of the man, Godwin

thought him a very unlikely visitor to the Princesses at Kew—a man of pleasure, the hanger-on and flatterer of the royal voluptuary, all his ways and thoughts attuned to the temper of his master: a man who had been prime favourite, but whose favour was waning, since royal voluptuaries are fickle, changing their friends as often as they change their mistresses.

“Well, Fanny,” he said presently, when she left off singing, “there was no crime in meeting Arden—accidentally.”

He dwelt upon the word, looking at her intently, and the soft blue eyes met his with the bold frankness of a truthful child.

“Crime! What harm could there be? Colonel Arden is a gentleman.”

“Say a gentleman’s gentleman—lacquey out of livery to the first gentleman in Europe.”

“It is horribly unkind of you to say such things, when you know I like the man.”

“It is unkind of my wife to cultivate the acquaintance of a man I dislike. Why beat about the bush? You know that your life ten years ago—when you were an inexperienced girl—fresh from a Cornish vicarage, and in the charge of a very foolish woman—gave rise to an unhappy scandal—a scandal that has been a cloud upon your name ever since. If you are not hopelessly lost to good feeling—if you are not wanting in modesty as well as wanting in sense, you will keep yourself clear of every association of those days, and you will avoid the Regent’s creatures as your most pernicious foes—and mine!”

“Stuff!” said Fanny, no longer the innocent girl, but the indignant woman. “Stuff. Mere stage nonsense! No one but an actor would talk as you do. Because I was pretty and very much admired—and because the Prince, who adores pretty women, took notice of me, and made a fuss about my acting among the friends who have always echoed his ideas and fancies—and because a few elderly women said things about me out of envy, hatred, and malice—you rake up that malicious talk of ten years ago, and make a tragedy of it. But you have gone too far, and henceforward I shall take my own way, and get a little happiness out of life, if I can, before I am old and ugly.”

She rushed out of the room and left him wondering what he was to do.

It seemed to him that he could do nothing. He had taken upon himself a burden, and he had tried to carry it bravely. He had tried to be patient and kind, a faithful husband, cherishing



and caring for his wife ; but she had broken away from him somehow. She cared for nothing that he cared for. Everything in his life was displeasing to her. Again and again she had told him that he ought never to have married : that no actor ought to marry. She had said these things, she who had knelt at his feet, and offered to be his odalisque.

She had been his odalisque perhaps ; but she had never been his wife.

Marriage without sympathy and understanding is no marriage. The one and only wife of the virtuous Englishman, if she does not understand as well as love him, is no more to him than a unit in Solomon's cosmopolitan seraglio could have been to the great king, a creature whose language was not his language, whose gods were not his gods.

Something perhaps Godwin might have done in fulfilment of the marriage vow—something perhaps he would have done to save this trivial woman from the hazards of her folly, if he had been heart-whole—if he could have set himself to the task with an honest desire to rule his wife through her affections, to make her happy, and to find his own peace and comfort in her society.

When he swore to love and cherish her till death parted them—that wintry morning not a year ago—he had not spoken the words lightly. He had realised their solemn meaning, and he had meant to keep his vow.

But now—as he thought how the distance had been slowly widening between himself and his wife—how month by month and day by day the armed neutrality had been developing upon her side into warfare—how her whole manner of life had come to remind him of a bird in a cage beating its foolish heart against the wires—and how pitiful it was to look forward to a long life in which they could be no better than fretful prisoner and unhappy warder—his heart seemed turned to lead. He had told himself that he would guard her from the shadow of evil ; but now it would seem that to guard her would be to circumvent all her plans, and watch her with unrelaxing care, and make her hate him.

And then he thought of that other woman—so calm, so wise—who, after seven years of widowhood, wealthy, beautiful, and independent of all control, had been touched by no breath of slander, who had kept herself aloof from the foolish pleasures of a foolish age—from the amenities of a profligate Court.

That woman, who in his mind embodied all that is noblest in womanhood, had offered him her friendship ; and he meant to

be her friend. To be worthy of her he must do his duty to his wife. Should he not go to her with his domestic troubles—confide in her—and let her, who was wise and kind, advise him how to deal with Fanny's un wisdom ?

The thought seemed inspiration. He snatched his hat from the hall table and went out of the house. The walk to Spring Gardens quieted his nerves. Only when he was near Lady Beaumont's door did he remember that he had no excuse for calling upon her at noon, when she had asked him to come in the evening.

He was shown into a room on the ground floor, a large room lined with books, evidently an addition to the original house. He had only time to take a casual survey of the bookcases before the door opened, and Isabel Beaumont came to him with outstretched hand.

He apologised for his morning visit.

"I am always glad to see a friend—morning or evening," she said. "I have no absorbing engagements—no distractions. My husband built this room for his books and for me, twelve years ago—and it has been my room ever since. My brother has his bookroom at the top of the house. Sit down, Mr. Godwin, and tell me your troubles. You look anxious and worried."

"How did you guess that I had troubles ?"

"I didn't guess. I know. Is it anything about the theatre ? Anything in which I can help you ?"

"No, Lady Beaumont, it is not about the theatre, but I want your help badly. Perhaps I do wrong in coming to you with my domestic anxieties—but I am so utterly at sea—and a sudden thought came like a flash of light in the midst of gloom. You said we were to be friends."

"I meant what I said. Your art has given me such delight—has lifted my mind out of the dullness of my empty existence—has been such a joy, that I want to be something more to you than just one of your audience. I want to be your friend. I have always believed in the possibility of a life-long friendship between a man and woman who can never be more than friends. I have seen such a friendship, and know how it filled a life that would otherwise have been a desert. Can you and I be such friends, Godwin ?"

She spoke the name softly, blushing as she dropped the prefix.

"It shall be the joy of my life to prove myself worthy of such friendship."

"Very well, then. To begin with, tell me all about your

domestic anxieties, and let me put my woman's wits to work to help you."

She seated herself at the round table and motioned him to a chair facing her. There was something in the voice, so grave and sweet, and in the tranquil face, so full of intelligence, yet so divinely calm, something that quieted his mind and made it easy for him to pour out his griefs—which were lightened already by her sympathy. He told his story of domestic failure without one unkind word about Fanny, without one hint of falsehood or wrongdoing on her part. All that he complained of was her unwillingness to break utterly with acquaintances he disliked, with associations that were unworthy of his wife.

"You may have heard that when my poor Fanny was very young, a girl just escaped from the schoolroom, and a stranger to the world of London, she had the misfortune to attract the attention of the Prince of Wales. Only to be admired by a man of his character was enough to make an actress talked about. Perhaps you do not know how cruel women can be to each other—most of all when they happen to be stage-rivals. Fanny's success at seventeen was enough to provoke the malice of every actress who had failed to please, or whose beauty and favour were waning. I need not tell you that if I had believed there was any ground for slander, Fanny Fountain would never have been my wife."

"I am sure of that," Isabel said quietly.

"She is my wife, and my most poignant anxiety must always be to cherish and protect her; but how am I to do that if she prefers her acquaintances of the Covent Garden green-room to my friends, and insists upon her right to receive visitors whose associations are hateful to me?"

"It is a difficult position, but I am convinced that in this, as in such cases I have known, affection and a wise forbearance on the husband's part will find the remedy. You must trust your wife. Your confidence will appeal to her best feelings; and you will find her ready to sacrifice the whim of the moment to please her husband. Be kind as well as serious. We are weak creatures, and opposition in trifles is apt to make us obstinate. The thing that hardly mattered before it was forbidden, becomes the one thing we will not forego. After all, the point in question is a small matter, and your wisdom will be to treat it lightly."

"No, it is not a small matter," Godwin protested. "I will have no man fetch and carry between my home and Carlton House."

"You have no right to say such a thing as that," Lady Beaumont said severely.

He flushed at her reproof. He knew that he had blundered, and that all his care in avoiding every suggestion that could injure Fanny was stultified by one angry speech. He was silent—hopeless and dejected. Did he believe in her, or was he only pretending to believe? Again and again he had recalled her resolute face, when he had looked into her eyes and asked her the crucial question, Was she worthy to be his wife? She had given him her answer, and he had believed her; and it was only since the night of the Regent's fête that a horrible doubt had come between them. Her tears and agitation, her anger at the Prince's neglect, had shaken his faith in her, and for the first time since his marriage he had begun to feel the husband's aching dread of some hideous discovery.

"I think my wife is honest, and think she is not." Those words, so often spoken on the stage, haunted him with senseless repetition. He sat silent for some minutes, too hopeless for speech. He half repented of having brought his trouble to Isabel Beaumont. The circumstances were too critical—fraught with suspicions which he might pretend to ignore, but which must be in his friend's mind while he talked to her.

It had been a false step—unfair to his wife, unfair to his friend. There could be no room in the ideal friendship for trouble about a third person. In the ideal friendship the world must hold nothing outside that solitude of two.

"I have done wrong to bring you my domestic worries," he said, "and I thank you a thousand times for your patience and sympathy. I will take your advice, and hope soon to tell you that all is well with my poor Fanny and me."

Isabel noted "Poor Fanny," twice repeated. It was the natural epithet for a woman who had never left off being a child—wayward—capricious—self-indulgent—and without self-respect—the typical spoilt child.

"You must bring your wife the next time you come to see me," she said. "Don't be afraid that I shall lecture her, or let her think that you and I have been talking about her. But if I can win her confidence, I might be a useful influence. I am prepared to love her, if she will let me. I am older, and more experienced than she is."

"Very little older, and half a century wiser," said Godwin, as they shook hands. "She will be delighted to know you—and you can do her worlds of good if you will be indulgent, and

remember what her life has been since seventeen, how many dangerous associations and how few good influences have come into it."

Godwin had expected a second refusal when he told Fanny of Lady Beaumont's invitation. He had no idea that she was particularly jealous of that lady, since it was her habit to be jealous of every woman to whom he spoke, or whom he praised. But to his surprise she was all sweetness on this occasion. Yes, she would like to go to one of Lady Beaumont's parties—friendly, familiar parties, such as women gave in Paris—at the cost of a few little cakes, and a carafe of eau sucrée, pleasant and cheap.

She had met her husband at breakfast with smiles and endearing words. The storm of yesterday seemed to have cleared the air, and to-day there was sunshine.

"I shall be delighted to go with you," she said. "I suppose I shall hardly want a new gown for that."

"You can have one, if you like."

"No, there wouldn't be time, and I have quite a decent white muslin. Do you like me in white muslin?"

"I like you in everything you wear, when you are kind, as you are to-day."

"And a blue sash?"

"A blue sash, by all means."

"And my hair in loose curls, with my pearl bandeau."

"Have you a pearl bandeau?"

"Yes, an insignificant thing. I bought it when I was playing Juliet. Poor little me! Always extravagant. I thought there was a world of spending in fifty pounds a week."

Godwin sighed. He had thought that there was a good deal of spending in fifty pounds; but his sumptuous hospitality, his lavish gifts to poor actors who brought the dismal story of their necessities to the successful tragedian, and were never sent empty away—his liberality in all his dealings, had left no large surplus out of an income such as few actors had ever enjoyed. Some thousands there were remaining after his London benefits, and his starring engagements in Ireland and Scotland; but not as much as there ought to have been, and Sarah Merritt sighed over the opposite pages of his banker's passbook, which she understood better than he did.

One thing had been done recently. In one of his morning rides he had found the cottage on Wimbledon Common which he had always had in his mind as a home for his mother's declining years. So long as he had a house she would share it. He could



not imagine a home without that cheerful presence, that unalterable love. But he would not always be there. In his vision of the future he had never imagined a long life. Length of days would be the last gift he would desire from the gods. In the slow hours of thought he had to face that spectre of old age—when he should no longer be Hamlet or Romeo.

It would be finished : his dream would be done, and there would be nothing left of fame, or fortune, or his delight in his art, except the remembrance that such things had been.

Some young man would spring up from nowhere, with the magical voice, the power that had been his—and he would be forgotten. People in remote places would hear with surprise that Godwin, the actor, was still alive.

He could not see himself living on ignobly as "the first old man," grinning and chuckling in the senile humours of Polonius, or pompous and solemn as the Doge of Venice. For him even middle age would mean the end of his stage-career. He would not play Romeo at five-and-forty, or try to charm his audience as Benedick at fifty. He could but look forward to renunciation or death. He had made up his mind that it would be death. He had lived intensely ; and he did not expect to live long. It would come suddenly, perhaps, that last fall of the curtain.

For this reason he was anxious to find the ideal home for his mother's last years—something like that home she had dreamt of when she hoped her adopted son would be happy as a village carpenter. The cottage-garden, the beehives ; such a home as she had pictured—only better.

He came upon the ideal cottage unexpectedly when he was riding slowly along the eastward edge of the common, thinking of other things, while the sails of the windmill, which was old even in the Regency, crept slowly round in the summer air.

He had galloped over broad stretches of turf in Richmond Park and had ridden along a narrow lane by the Beverley Brook, and then up the hill to the Windmill, and across the common ; and now he was letting his horse walk while he gave himself up to vague dreams of impossible things.

He was not more than half a mile from the house where William Pitt had come home to die after the fatal news of Austerlitz, when he looked up suddenly and saw the cottage he wanted, a low, white house tapestried with roses, a steep, thatched roof and deep-set dormer windows, a spacious garden sheltered by yew hedges, a paddock, and in the background a little wood of Scotch firs. The garden was full of flowers and weeds. A board an-

nounced that the freehold of the house, stables, garden, and paddock was for sale.

Godwin rode to the nearest inn, gave his horse in charge to the ostler, and walked back to the cottage, where he found the typical female caretaker, feeble and elderly, with her head tied up in a red cotton handkerchief, a caretaker who seemed to have made up her mind to live and die there, and who reluctantly showed him the house, sighing despondingly as she led the way from room to room, conscientiously pointing out every stain of damp upon the ceiling or the walls, and enlarging on the fact that no door would open or shut without trouble, and that all the chimneys smoked, while there were mice on the upper floors and rats in the basement. In spite of which drawbacks, Godwin told her, laughing, that it was just the house he wanted.

"You don't mind rats, sir?" sighed the melancholy dame.

"Not I. With such lively company one would never feel lonely."

"That's strange, sir. People as have looked at the house in my time have said they wouldn't mind the damp, or the smoky chimlies, and they wouldn't much mind mice: but they couldn't put up with rats."

"I see! The rats are your ace of trumps. Poor old soul. How long have you been caretaker here?"

"Near three years, sir."

"And you don't mind the rats?"

"I keep out of their way, sir. I sleep at the top of the house—and though I often hear 'em scampering on the stairs, they don't come as far as my room."

"Well, my good lady, you and the rats will have to part company—for I mean to buy the house. So you'll have to get another billet, and do your best to get a tenant for another house—as conscientiously as you have tried to get a purchaser for this one."

"I never tell lies, sir."

"But you imagine things sometimes—these rats, for instance?"

"When you come to live in the house, sir, and hear them scratching in the closets, and gnawing the rafters, from morning till night, you'll know whether I'm a liar," she said, with some angry tears.

He gave her a sovereign, and left her curtsying and consoled. She doubted if he would buy the house. The rats had never failed—and she had actually seen one in the scullery in the course of her three years.

Godwin was charmed with the garden, and liked the house, which was roomy and picturesque, having been developed from a labourer's cottage by additions and improvements that showed considerable taste. He explored the garden of two acres—plenty of room for beehives—and the paddock of about treble that extent. The morning air was elixir, and the view westward across that wide stretch of turf and gorse extended over a pastoral valley, with patches of wood and glimpses of blue water, far away to the Surrey hills. His mother might be happy here for her last halting-place after his journey was done.

"It shall be my exchange for the van," he said to himself as he rode home.

He called on the landlord's agent that afternoon, and by the next day the cottage was his. It was known as Mount Pleasant, and he would not have changed the name for worlds. He felt happier after this was done. With her house and garden and her annuity, the dear creature who had cared for him from the day he was born would be safe from the storms of fate.

He had bought the house in Sarah Merritt's name, and it was hers from the hour he handed her the title-deeds.

"It was better than any cottage I could have found for you in the Romsey Road, if I had done ever so well with my plane and saw," he said, and she thanked him, and kissed him, between laughter and tears.

"Oh, how wicked it would have been to prentice you to a village carpenter, and to cheat the world of the finest Hamlet that ever lived."

"Foolish, foolish mother! What do you know of the other Hamlets, except John Kemble? You never saw Garrick or Betterton, those two great actors who lived before our time. Who knows how great they may have been? Well, mother, you helped me to be an actor—and I have had my dream. I should not have prospered as a carpenter. The village folks would have laughed at me as the incapable workman who never had the tools he wanted in his basket, and who left a job half finished while he spouted Shakespeare. We'll drive up to Wimbledon, and look at the cottage some fine afternoon before I go to Ireland."

He was going to Ireland in September on one of those starring engagements that brought him wealth. He was to play all the old parts, and all his recent successes in comedy. His Irish audiences worshipped him. They took the horses out of his carriage, and dragged him from the theatre to his hotel: they

stood in the streets to cheer him as he went home : they filled the theatre to suffocation every night of his engagement : they forgot that they had ever applauded any other actor. He was their divine Hamlet, their incomparable Othello.

He took Fanny to Lady Beaumont's Sunday evening party, and she looked her prettiest in her muslin frock and blue sash. She behaved prettily, also, and the Duchess of Pentland, who was there that evening, praised her warmly in a few minutes' confidential talk with Godwin.

" I don't know what you can want more in a wife than you have in that charming girl," she said.

" Yes, I admit the charm ; but if I am not contented it is her fault, not mine. I should be satisfied if she were happy."

" Is she not happy ? "

" I fear not."

" Then you must take more pains to please her. Husbands are apt to forget that they have been lovers, while wives expect them to be lovers till the end of the chapter. And remember, my dear Godwin, that there is no room in a husband's life for a romantic friendship with another woman."

There was grave reproof in her tone, and Godwin's eyes flashed defiance.

" I will do my wife no wrong ; but I must dream my dream," he said.

" And you think you can lead a dual life ; be true to that pretty creature in white muslin, and live in a dream of the impossible. My poor Godwin, you are playing with fire ; and if you go on, the conflagration will mean the ruin of three lives. Already you have provoked Malcolm Crawford's jealousy. He has been watching you ever since you came in, and his face threatens an unpleasant quarter of an hour for his sister, after we are gone."

" Why does she harbour an incipient madman ? I shudder when I think of her danger."

" You exaggerate the danger. The man is not mad."

" That is what his friends say of the homicidal lunatic a week before he murders his nearest and dearest. Oh, my dear Duchess, if you are Lady Beaumont's friend, for Heaven's sake use your influence. Persuade her to find another home for her brother. She is rich enough to give him a bachelor establishment. She cannot be happy, with that dark figure between her and the sunshine. She cannot be happy ; and he is miserable."

" He would be miserable anywhere—and he adores his sister.

It is his redeeming virtue. What do you think would happen if she sent him out of the only home he has ever known, except the monastery? The chances are that he would kill himself, and break Isabel's heart. That would be the probable result of your precautionary measure."

Godwin was silent.

He had had very little speech with Lady Beaumont that evening; but she was gracious and attentive to Fanny, sitting by her on a sofa near the piano, and talking to her in the intervals of the music; in return for which kindness Fanny told her husband that she did not like being patronised, and that Lady Beaumont's party was the dullest she had ever endured.

"You will at least admit that her drawing-room is beautiful, and that there was some fine music."

"Oh, no doubt you thought it delightful. You are her devoted slave; and everybody can see that she is in love with you."

"I'm sorry you were not amused," Godwin answered carelessly, ignoring her last speech.

"Oh, it doesn't matter how dull her parties are. I shall never enter her house again."

"Is that because you think I am in love with her?"

"Because I know you are in love with her."

"Fanny, are you one of those shallow-brained people who cannot believe in friendship between a pure-minded woman and an honourable man?"

"Yes, I suppose I am shallow-brained, for I don't believe in your friendship"—she snapped out the word as if it had been a pistol-shot—"for Lady Beaumont, or hers for you. I remember her face the first night of 'Othello,' when you and I looked at her through a hole in the curtain, and afterwards when I watched her from the wing in your great scene. She has been in love with you ever since."

That speech haunted him in the watches of the night. Ever since—ever since that unforgotten night, when he saw her face for the first time—the passionless face, the earnest eyes, the sweet, grave mouth. "In love with him." The mere suggestion was an insult to that divine purity. He had told himself that she understood him, that she sympathised with him. He had never dared to think of love when he thought of her. He had defied Fate; and he had sworn to be her friend. He forbade himself to imagine any closer bond.

Monday morning revealed a world steeped in sunshine, and



Godwin sent to the livery stables for an open carriage, and took his mother and his wife to Wimbledon, where they were to survey the cottage, and lunch at the inn, the old red-brick inn, chief feature in the village of a single street, made up of substantial Georgian houses, with a modest little shop here and there; a wide street, where there was plenty of room for the horse-trough in front of the inn, and for the double flight of broad stone steps that led up to the door.

Sarah Merritt was delighted with Mount Pleasant, in her quiet way, not saying very much, but squeezing her son's arm as he led her through the rooms. She laughed at the story of the rats, more especially as Hector, who was with them, showed no emotion beyond natural curiosity in a strange house, whereas the least suspicion of a rat would have made him frantic. He pattered up and down the stairs, looked out of every window, barked furiously at a cat on the other side of the paddock, and made wild dashes downstairs to find his way out of the house to get at his racial foe,

Fanny professed herself enchanted. The cottage was picturesque, artistic, everything she loved in cottages.

"Ah, Godwin, if you were not an actor, how happy you and I might be here—far from the madding crowd."

"Unfortunately I am an actor, and I bought Mount Pleasant for my mother."

"True," sighed Fanny, "but I think I should feel ten years younger if I lived here."

"We'll furnish the house, and make it as pretty as we can, and we three can come here on a summer Sunday morning and stay till Monday afternoon," said Godwin kindly.

He was always ready to please his wife with things that cost money. If he could not give her his heart—and he had honestly tried to do that—his purse was at her disposal.

The days went by, and the actors and actresses at Drury Lane were talking of the end of the season, and a vacation that brought little joy, since salaries would cease till the theatre reopened late in September. Some were going to make the best of this compulsory holiday; and the talk in the green-room was of Margate, or of Brighton, where the Pavilion made an atmosphere of splendour that increased the price of oysters, and filled the summer night with the music of the royal band, wafted from the palace windows to the promenaders on the Steyne.

Mrs. Fitzherbert was living in modest seclusion not a quarter of a mile from the Regent's fantastical palace; but the idlers

on the Steyne were not curious about her. What they wanted was a peep at Lady Conyngham, glorious in diamonds and rouge, as she alighted from her chariot at the royal doorway.

Some of the Drury Lane company had farther-reaching thoughts, and talked of Boulogne, which had its vogue as a place enlivened by the society of English spendthrifts, and where Brummel was languishing in exile—not hopeless, but hugging himself with the fancy that the Prince who had loved him and copied his waistcoats, would relent and take the penitent to his heart again; and the sun would shine, and his debts would be paid, and he would saunter once more on the shady side of Pall Mall.

Some had secured engagements and salaries to fill the gap in time, at Bath, or York, or Exeter—or, with still better luck, at Elliston's theatre on the Surrey side, or even at the Cobourg.

Godwin's engagements in Ireland were to begin a few days after the closing of the great London theatre.

"Well, my dear Fanny," he said kindly, as they sat at breakfast, she absorbed in the fashionable news in the morning paper, and he attending to the solicitations of Hector, who was tugging at his arm, as he ate his cutlet. "You greedy wretch; yes, you shall have the bone in a minute or two. Well, Fanny, I hope you are getting on with your preparations for Ireland. I know my mother will help you to pack, and she is as good at that as she is at most things. She used to pack my stage rags for me—and make up my bundle for the theatre every night."

His bundle! The great tragedian, who had his valet and dresser, had not forgotten the nightly trudge to the theatre, with a bundle of stage properties under his arm, and a sword in a green-baize bag that Sarah had made for him.

"I don't know what you are talking about," Fanny drawled in her fine lady voice. "It is you who are going to Ireland—not I."

"My dear, I am going to take you with me. It will be a delightful tour. I told you when I made my plans that you were to go with me. A second honeymoon."

His smile was half sad, half ironical, remembering the failure of their Hampshire journey.

"I know you said something about Ireland; but, of course, I thought you were joking."

"Why of course? I shall be away seven weeks. Do you suppose I should leave you here alone all that time?"

"Oh, I shall be well taken care of. Don't be alarmed. I shall

have mother, and if you were kind, I might have poor old auntie part of the time."

"You might, no doubt; but I am not going to leave you at home. My mother will go to Wimbledon, and this house will be shut up," Godwin said, with an air of finality, and occupied himself with feeding Hector, who was an exacting companion at a meal.

"An over-indulged beast, ugly and a nuisance," was Fanny's description of her husband's favourite. She had pined for a King Charles or a Blenheim, and Godwin had only refused her that indulgence on the ground that Hector would allow no rival near his throne.

There was more talk about the Irish trip next day, and Fanny cried over herself as if she had been Bluebeard's wife, and without a brother to rescue her. She had cogent reasons for not going to Ireland. Imprimis she was a wretched sailor, and the passage to Boulogne six years ago had been almost her death.

"I had to be carried on shore," she said, "and I was worse on the passage home. The Irish voyage would kill me. And then what could be more tiring than a tour in that wild country, rushing from town to town, shaken to death in stage-coaches?"

"There will be no stage-coaches to shake you. I shall post from place to place."

"Horridly expensive—and I am told that the roads are dreadful, and absolutely dangerous for a post-chaise."

"I am sorry the idea of the tour does not please you, but I hope you will find the reality more agreeable."

His determined air cowed her. He was paler than usual, and his long upper lip looked as if it were made of steel. She had seen that look when he spoke his last line, as Iago. "From this time forth I never more speak word."

When next questioned about her packing, Fanny told her husband that she was getting on with it pretty well. Mother had been kind, and had packed her largest trunk for her.

No more was said about the tour, and Fanny sang as she went up and down stairs—but the strain was mournful. It was Ophelia's music that she warbled.

"And will he not come again?"

"Am I a tyrant?" Godwin thought when he saw her fretful countenance, which looked at him more in anger than in sorrow. "No. I am trying to do my duty by this foolish creature, who is not to be trusted with her own destiny. She threw herself

into my arms. She gave me herself and her fate ; and I must make the best and not the worst of the life she gave me. Some day, perhaps, she will be wiser—and we shall be an ideal couple—the wife not too clever, the husband tired of the world, and glad to sit in the chimney-corner, and smile at the partner whom custom has made dear. We are miles apart now—we may be nearer and fonder when our heads are grey."

Idle thoughts, born of sadness and the sense of failure—thoughts that did not stay.

No, he could not think of himself as old, and contented with idleness and old age. He could not think of himself as sitting within four walls—"the world forgetting ; by the world forgot." His career had been too brilliant. His dream had been too enthralling. When the green curtain fell for the last time on that dream-world there would be nothing left him but death.

The post-chaise was at the door at seven o'clock on a misty autumn morning, for the first stage on the journey to Holyhead, a journey for which Godwin had allowed the best part of a week. Had he been going alone, he would have travelled day and night, in stage-coaches, and would have done the journey in half the time. He was in his dressing-room, ready for the start, when Mrs. Merritt came to him with a face of distress.

"Fanny is ill, dear. Much too ill to travel."

"What's the matter ? The usual headache ?"

"Worse than her worst headache. I went to her before six o'clock with her breakfast. She was sitting up in bed, crying as if her heart would break, and she had a shivering fit that frightened me. She doesn't know what is the matter with her, but she thinks she has got a bad chill."

Godwin sent his valet post haste to Sir David Tranby, the physician who had attended him after the duel, and hurried to his wife's bedside. He found her tossing a dishevelled head upon a tumbled pillow, with flushed cheeks, and swollen eyelids. She was hysterical, and could tell him nothing about her illness, except that she had been awake all night, in a burning fever.

The hand he held was cold, not feverish, but the flushed cheeks might mean fever, and her pulse was quicker than it ought to be.

"My dear girl, you were fast asleep when I looked into your room at half-past five," he said gently.

"My eyes were shut, and I was too exhausted to speak. I heard every call of those hateful watchmen."

Her speech was broken by sobs. Godwin could make nothing of her. What can any husband make of hysteria, that purely feminine ailment, which baffles the understanding of man?

"The chaise is at the door, Fanny, and if we don't start soon we shan't reach the inn where our rooms are engaged before midnight."

"What?" cried Fanny, with widened eyes. "Do you think that I can travel in this state—sit in a post-chaise for twelve hours in the burning sun?"

"I think if you are reasonable, and wish to please me, you will get up instantly and let my mother help to dress you."

"You are a heartless tyrant, and you want me to die."

"I want you to behave like a wife who loves—or at least respects her husband. I have sent for Sir David Tranby. If he says you are too ill to travel you shall stay here till you are well."

"I know I am in for a long illness," Fanny said, curiously subdued.

The mention of Sir David had made her thoughtful. She sat up among the tumbled pillows, watching her husband as he paced the room, and then, at the sound of formal footsteps on the landing, she threw back her hair, gave a faint scream, and flung herself among her pillows sobbing.

The physician came in with his slow step and serious countenance—looking like a man who could cure with a word—a being of supernatural powers.

He seated himself by the bed, laid two square-tipped fingers upon Fanny's wrist, and looked at a watch that had been presented to him by his future king, after his recovery from a bad fit of gout.

"Can you tell me what has caused this disturbance of our nerves, dear lady? Is it indigestion? Have we been eating anything that has disagreed with us—or have we been a little dissipated—too many evening parties? Candidly, I suspect evening parties. We have been playing the woman of fashion—keeping late hours—and fretting our nerves to fiddle-strings."

He smiled blandly—but Fanny only sobbed, and gasped, and choked, and clutched her long tresses of blonde hair.

"Perhaps if you would allow me a few minutes' quiet talk with our sweet patient," the physician said.

"By all means," Godwin answered. "I will wait in the next room. I ought to tell you that my wife is going to Ireland with me, and it is vital that we should start immediately—unless the



journey is to be hurried. We are to post to Holyhead by easy stages, only travelling by day, and I have made every arrangement for my wife's comfort on the road."

"Naturally," said Sir David, as if for the moment under the impression that Godwin had married a daughter of the premier duke.

He was with his patient for about ten minutes before he went into Godwin's dressing-room.

"Well, Sir David? What do you discover?"

"A remarkably delicate organisation—a nature as sensitive as an *Æolian harp*."

"But is she ill—seriously ill?"

"No, my dear Godwin. I apprehend nothing serious."

"In that case I can take her to Ireland?"

"That is another question—and I should say no. Women of her type are delicately constituted, and what might be of no importance in a less sensitive patient might be hazardous for her."

"But now, Sir David, plainly, is it not a simple case of hysteria, the kind of hysteria that simulates illness unconsciously?"

"Undoubtedly there is hysteria—but"—the physician became unutterably solemn—"there may be—indeed I shrewdly suspect—something else."

"You suspect some real illness? Can't you be sure about it?"

"No, I cannot be sure—but as your friend, Godwin, I say don't risk a long road journey and the Channel passage for that sweet wife of yours."

"I am bound to follow your advice," Godwin said gloomily.

"If you refuse to do so, you might regret it for the rest of your life."

The physician accepted his fee with the unconscious air acquired by long experience—an automatic closing of the plump white fingers over the guineas Godwin slipped into his palm as they shook hands; and in the next minute he was gone.

Godwin sent the post-chaise back to the livery yard, with a half-guinea for the postboy, and a message of apology to the master of the yard.

"I shall travel by the night mail," he told Renshaw, his devoted body-servant, a man of forty, who had failed dismally as a provincial actor, never escaping from that house of bondage called "general utility," and never having known what it was to be sure of his dinner till he met Godwin in Bow Street one day, and after a long and doleful recital of the miserable experiences

of the last six years, since they two had been acting together on the northern circuit, entered his old comrade's service as dresser, valet, and factotum, an office in which he proved himself superior to his highest efforts in the drama. Godwin never forgot the prentice days in which Renshaw and he had suffered the same hardships, and there was always more of the friend than the master in the successful actor's treatment of the man who had failed.

"What does Sir David say?" Fanny asked, starting up, as her husband came into the room. "He must have seen how ill I am."

"I don't think the good old mole has seen very far below the surface, Fanny; but he has given his advice, and I must accept it—which I do most reluctantly."

"I am not to go to Ireland?"

"No. You are to go to Wimbledon next week with my mother. You will have country air to cure your imaginary complaint, and you will be well taken care of."

"No doubt I shall be taken care of, fussed to death; and I shall expire of ennui. Why can't we stay in this house?"

"London in August would be bad for you, and my mother wants change of air."

"You are very unkind, George."

"What, when I am giving you your way?"

"But you do it most ungraciously. You know how I hate the country," she said, forgetting her enthusiasm about the Wimbledon cottage, when it was new. "I have never lived out of London since I left papa's vicarage."

"There is no other way, my dear," Godwin answered wearily.

The gulf between man and wife was wider than ever. He was angry with her, and he suspected her—and suspicion and anger about a creature so frail and tender were agony to a man of his temperament. He wanted to be kind; and she had thrown him into a fever of indignation. He knew that her illness was a sham. He knew that the interesting condition hinted at by the physician had no existence. He knew that it was not her dread of the journey, but the desire to remain in London that had influenced her. What could he do? The Irish tour was vital. He could not disappoint the managers who had treated with him upon the most liberal terms—nor the Irish public, who had received him with an enthusiasm in which admiration for the actor seemed to have grown into personal affection. Scotland had given him much; but Ireland had given him more. In

Edinburgh he had been the delight of the cultivated upper classes. In Dublin he had been the idol of the people. He could not play fast and loose with his friends across the Irish Sea. He must go to Ireland to reap new laurels, and leave Fanny in his mother's care. He must put his trust in the friend who had never failed him.

He had a long and serious conversation with Sarah Merritt, spent an hour by his wife's bedside in quiet and kindly talk, and left her with a farewell kiss—tempered, like most of Fanny's kisses, with her tears.

The assumption of illness was maintained to the last, but with less emphasis than in the morning. Fanny's hysteria had served her turn.

"Dr. Fenwick will come to see you every day till you go to Wimbledon," Godwin told her. "He is an old friend, and you will feel at your ease with him. If you don't get well, and are not satisfied with his treatment, you can send for Sir David."

"I don't want Sir David or anybody. But suppose I am not strong enough to move out of this house next week?"

"My dear, you will be strong enough," he answered with a look and tone that put an end to argument. "I have arranged everything with my mother. As soon as the house is ready she will take you there."

"You and your mother treat me like a child."

"Have you not behaved rather like one?"

Renshaw knocked at the door.

"We've no more than time for the mail, sir."

The stars were shining as Godwin sprang into the hackney coach, into which Hector had leapt before him. He took his place on the empty seat beside his master and licked his face discreetly—just that one little touch of the tongue that is the dog's equivalent for the human kiss. There were moments of ecstatic affection when the tongue was unmannerly and swept over the master's face.

A long, lonely journey, through the soft summer night, almost alone in the stage-coach, with only Renshaw and a commercial traveller snoring on the opposite seat, and Hector nestling beside his master. Godwin had paid for two places, one for himself and one for his dog, and the third place was empty. A sleepless night of silence and thought, a night of waking dreams.

His thoughts were of the two women who ruled his life—the foolish wife to whom he was bound by his sense of duty and of honour, the wife for whose well-being and good conduct he had

made himself accountable to God and man, and the woman-friend upon whose affection he had begun to rest as his strong rock and his refuge. He knew that she loved him, with such love as the pure in spirit can feel without fear or shame ; and he thought that he loved her with a love as free from all taint of earthly passion.

He had spent an hour with her on the day before his intended journey, and they had talked of many things. She was going to Scotland in September to stay quietly at her old manor-house, and her brother was going with her, but she would be in London in time for the next season at Drury Lane.

" I mean to see you in all your new plays," she said.

" Then I shall have an audience," he answered, smiling. " You have spoilt me, Isabel ; and when you are not there I am acting to blank walls."

They were Isabel and George by this time. Godwin knew when first the barrier had fallen. He remembered how he had looked into her eyes one night as they stood with hands clasped in the accustomed leave-taking, and saw that their friendship had reached a stage in which formalities might cease. He had not held her hand a moment longer than usual, but her name had come to his lips while their hands met.

" Good night, Isabel."

" Good night, George," she had answered, with a faint blush, but no sign of displeasure.

Did she love him, this man whom she knew as the husband of another woman ? Was this friendship a delusion, a shallow imposture with which she deceived herself and masked her sin ? If she did, it was with a passion so exempt from the baser elements of love that she might be forgiven for believing herself free so to love the man who belonged to another. The love of a woman for a great actor is different from any other love. It is more romantic, more unselfish, more exalted : a love made of dreams and exquisite illusions.

She invests the actor with the brightest qualities of the character he represents. Before she has seen him off the stage, or spoken with him, or touched his hand, she has made him her idol. He is Hamlet, he is Romeo. She cannot dissociate him from the part he is playing. He is there before her eyes, handsome and graceful. His voice is music, his speech is poetry. It is he who speaks those sublime words ; and those high-reaching thoughts are his. She has forgotten that those flights of eloquence, that splendid imagery, are all in the book from which he and a

long line of actors have learnt their parts. She forgets that Betterton and Garrick spoke the same burning words, and that foolish women had fallen in love with Hamlet or Romeo before her favourite actor was born. It would be idle to remind her, when, with clasped hands and trembling lips, she watches the changes of his countenance and listens to the melody of his voice, that he is only a stage-player, who by infinite pains and profound study has made himself supreme in a difficult art.

For her, he is Romeo. For her, he is Hamlet. It is only when he acts an unsympathetic character that she sees the performance as a work of art. His Richard the Third may be superb in its grim reality ; but *he* is not Richard. There she is a better critic, and can see and understand the actor's power.



## CHAPTER XXIV

GODWIN'S reception in Dublin was even more enthusiastic than on his first appearance there. His Sir Giles Overreach, his Benedick and Don Felix were new to his Irish audience. His talent as a comedian was a revelation. Dublin had admired Charles Kemble, but admirable as Kemble was in comedy, the charm of Godwin's youth, and the light gaiety which seemed the natural exuberance of a joyous temperament rather than the actor's art, were a surprise to the playgoers who had considered the older actor unsurpassable in the same characters at five-and-fifty. However perfect the actor's art, the Benedick of five-and-twenty must needs have some advantage over the middle-aged comedian.

Crowded audiences, invitations from the best people in Dublin, testified to the actor's popularity. Supper-parties after the theatre kept him engaged into the deep of night. He was fêted by the Castle, run after by all that was gayest and most cultivated in Irish society; and he had no time to think. It was only after some late party, after two or three hilarious hours spent in a running fire of wit, in an endless succession of anecdotes, of which the last always seemed the most outrageous and the best—after his health had been drunk with musical honours, and toasts, loyal and disloyal, had made the candles in the chandelier tremble with the noise and fervour of Irish feeling, that Godwin had leisure for remembrance and longing, as he tramped over the open spaces in the Phoenix Park, or along the lonely shore by the Liffey, in the grey light of early morning.

Through all that time of success and adulation upon which the actor's self-love might have battered to the forgetfulness of all other feelings, Godwin's thoughts were of the woman who had given him perfect sympathy and perfect friendship: the ideal friendship, all that a man could desire or demand of a friend.

He wrote to her every other day, whatever his engagements at the theatre or in society. For him who had always loved the night better than the day to write a long letter was only a question of less time for sleep. He wrote to her as he talked to her;

not without egotism, for he had to tell her his every thought and feeling. Upon his success as an actor he touched lightly. "You are not there, and I act to blank walls—only they are noisy walls," he told her. But upon higher things—upon life and death, and the after-life, he wrote fully. It was like talking to her. For the moment, while he was writing, she was with him. He looked up, and expected to see her standing there.

Cork and Limerick were as ardent as Dublin, and Godwin played to crowded houses every night, and was fêted by all that was enlightened and superior in the society of both cities—while in Belfast, where Hibernian fervour was tempered by Caledonian judgment, he found public and critics full of enthusiasm. The theatre in Cork was not big enough to hold half the people who wanted to see him in his recent successes; and at the urgent request of the lessee he had consented to give the last week of the Drury Lane vacation—which he had reserved for idleness at Wimbledon—to his friends at Cork. He was to play six nights.

It was on returning to his hotel after the last performance, somewhat exhausted by an ovation that had been even more tumultuous than his leave-taking in Dublin, that he found a letter from his mother. She had not been so good a correspondent as usual during this Irish tour. Her letters had been far apart, and had contained few particulars of her domestic life. The move to Wimbledon had not been made. Mount Pleasant was not ready, and Fanny did not want to leave London. She fancied herself an invalid, and dependent upon Sir David Tranby's advice, but there was no occasion for Godwin to be uneasy, as Sir David had assured Mrs. Merritt there was nothing to be alarmed about, only a little hypochondria, to which pretty women with indulgent husbands have always been liable.

This had been the gist of his mother's letters so far; but to-night the letter was long, and Godwin had not read three lines before he looked across the room at his valet, who was busied with the arrangement of his master's stage-jewels in their leather cases.

"Have I any engagement to-night, Renshaw?"

"You've not forgotten surely, sir? The Mayor's supper-party."

"And the Mayor is such a good fellow. I hate disappointing him; but I have to do it."

"You're not ill, I hope. They must have upset you with their infernal rumpus—calling you back, and forcing a speech from you."

" Nonsense, Tom, I like to thank them. Do you suppose my heart doesn't warm to the wild creatures ? You must go to the Mayor's house as fast as your legs will carry you—it's only in the next street—and tell him I've got to leave Cork by the night mail. There's no time for me to write. And you must take our places in the coach as you come back—or if there's no room in the coach, we must post to Kingstown. We've got to cross by the first packet."

" Is there anybody ill, sir ? Not Mrs. Merritt ? "

" Nobody is ill—but there's trouble."

Renshaw looked distressed.

" Whatever you order must be done," he said ; " but I shall have sharp work to get ready. It's lucky I packed everything yesterday, except the Sir Giles costume and your dress-suit for the supper."

" Don't talk, Tom, but run."

Renshaw obeyed. He idolised his master, who had never treated him like a servant ; for which reason, perhaps, there was no menial or difficult service that Thomas Renshaw would not have performed with alacrity and goodwill, for George Godwin.

When he was gone, his master sat brooding over the letter that had caused this hurry and trouble.

" First, you must forgive me, my dearest, for having kept back this letter so that it should reach you only on the last night of your engagement. It was written before I received yours in which you told me of the extra week at Cork—and I kept it back so that your farewell nights shouldn't be spoilt by uncomfortable thoughts of home.

" Don't be frightened, dear, no one is ill ; nothing dreadful has happened—nothing that cannot be undone, or settled for the best, for you and others. Fanny has left us, and is now in a house of her own with her aunt. You know I never liked that woman—and you know I was, and am, very fond of poor Fanny. There is no harm in her, pretty foolish thing ! And she can't help being born without brains. Her letter will tell you why she has gone. There was no quarrel. She came to me in her bonnet and shawl, and told me she was going to leave you, because you and she were unsuited, and because you would be much happier without her, and she would be happier in a house of her own, with her dear aunt, who adored her, and had been breaking her heart ever since their separation. I needn't go into what I said. Of course, I tried all I could to get her to stop—told her she was foolish and wicked—and that nobody would believe she was not

going off with a lover. She cried and made a fuss, swore she had no lover, and wanted no lover—only to be her own mistress, and not to be treated as if she were a child in the nursery. You would find that she could live like a lady. All I could say was useless. She wouldn't be persuaded. She went off in a hackney-coach with some of the luggage—and she sent a van two days afterwards for the rest of her things, which she had packed on the sly, and for all her furniture, of which the carman had a list, in Miss Fountain's handwriting, with a paper addressed to me, telling me to see that all her niece's property was carefully removed from her boudoir, and packed in the van she had sent.

"The things were to be taken to Lavender Lodge, Notting Hill—quite in the country, the carman told me. Well, dear, I knew this furniture was Fanny's property, and that I had no right to interfere, so I stood in the hall and watched the men carrying it out; and when they were gone, I walked about the silent house, and looked into Fanny's rooms—and your marriage seemed like a bad dream.

"Oh, my dearest, I hope this will not make you unhappy. It will be for you to act as you think best for your peace of mind and hers. I shall never trouble you with advice. Whatever you do will seem wise in my sight; but don't let me see you unhappy. That is the only thing I could not bear."

He put down the letter with clouded eyes. Yes, this was love—the maternal instinct—supreme in self-abnegation, though the woman who so loved him had never been a mother.

He broke the seal of Fanny's letter. It was not long, though it covered two sides of the sheet of Bath post. "Don't be angry with me, George. I am doing what is wisest for both of us. Our marriage was a mistake. You never really cared for me. I flung myself at your feet. I had no womanly pride. I forgot everything in this world except my love for you. I was mad, blind, besotted, when I married a man who did not love me—who only wanted to be kind, as if kindness could be any use to a woman passionately in love. Your kindness has been killing me; and your house is killing me—this large gloomy house, haunted by the man who cut his throat in the garden. Your good homely mother meant to be kind, but she worried me to death—her tidiness—her long face if I was late for dinner. She took the poetry out of our lives. I could have been happy with you on a desert island, but not in Bedford Square. Good-bye. I am going to live in a cottage at Notting Hill, with Aunt Lavinia. I am not going to disgrace you—but I cannot endure a prison—

and you and your mother between you have made this house a prison. Forget everything that has happened since the day when you came to me in my distress. God bless you, George Godwin. I shall always remember you as the most generous of men."

Godwin was in London—only one night before the theatre was to reopen for the autumn season. It was Wednesday night when he arrived, and he was to play Hamlet on Thursday. He found a letter from Harvey, who had evidently been anxious.

"You run things deuced close, my dear Godwin. Every box has been taken for to-morrow night—and the Regent is coming—which may mean a row in the front of the house—for his Royal Highness has been offending everybody, and mud was thrown at his glass coach as he drove from Carlton House to Manchester Square the other day. We must do all we can to keep the audience in good temper, and concentrate attention on the stage. If you don't turn up at rehearsal to-morrow morning, I shall be in what my wife calls a fanteeg."

Little time to hunt down a runaway wife in the face of such grave responsibilities as were involved in the fortunes of Drury Lane—and yet Godwin gave all his thoughts to the woman who had won him by what seemed a love as boundless as Juliet's, and who had grown tired of him in less than a year.

He sat late on the night of his return, talking with his mother—from whom he heard a full account of Fanny's life after he left for Ireland.

"I would not write worrying letters," Mrs. Merritt said. "What was the use of my telling you things that might have made you uncomfortable, and interfered with your acting? Your future and your reputation were at stake. You have told me that for you to stand still would be to fail—and I wanted you to rise higher and higher in the estimation of your Irish audience. The newspapers Renshaw sent me told what a tremendous success you were making."

"Well," he said impatiently, "the things you didn't write about? Let me hear them now."

"You are not angry with me?"

"No, I am never angry. Whatever you do is right."

"The first thing was about Miss Fountain."

"Aunt Lavinia?"

"Yes. Three days after you left, Fanny told me that her aunt was coming on a visit. She had asked her to come for a



fortnight or three weeks, while you were in Ireland. You had said before your marriage that her aunt was to visit her sometimes, but I was not to tell you anything about it till you came home. You had all sorts of notions ; you were prejudiced against her aunt, or there could have been nothing to prevent you giving her a home in this big dreary house. Poor Fanny ! She was always calling the house dreary. Perhaps she missed the dust."

" Well ? "

" Well, dear, Miss Fountain arrived in a hackney-coach, with the roof piled sky-high. From the amount of her luggage one would suppose she had come to end her days here. She even brought her canary. She saw I was astonished, and she told me she was moving. Her cot was damp, and she was going into another cot when she left us. I made no remark upon this, and I made everything comfortable and pleasant for your wife's nearest relation. After all, it seemed only natural that Fanny should be fond of her own flesh and blood. She told me that she wanted a chaperon, as you did not like her to go out alone, and that now her aunt was with her, she could go about and enjoy the last of the fine weather. And go about she did. She was always out of doors. She had the open carriage from the livery stable every other day—and when she and her aunt were not driving to Richmond, or Kew, or Hampstead, they were walking in St. James's Park, or looking at the shops in Bond Street. I ventured to say that Fanny was overdoing it, and would make herself ill, but Miss Fountain was haughty with me, and said she was quite capable of taking care of her niece. I told her I had no doubt of that, but as I had been left in charge of your wife, I had to think of what was best for her, and of what you wished. Well, dear, there's no use making a long story of it. They were always off and away—always colloquing together. If there was mischief, Lavinia Fountain was at the bottom of it. She must always have been a bad influence for her niece—an excitable silly woman, much too fond of a good dinner and a bottle of wine. I can tell you she punished your old Madeira."

" Horrible woman," groaned Godwin, but it was not of the Madeira he was thinking.

" Was Miss Fountain with my wife when she left you finally ? "

" No, Aunt Lavinia took herself and her trunks away nearly a week before Fanny went. But I know she was the evil spirit. She lured your wife away."

" Well, I shall hear the truth to-morrow."

He was angry, and he was disgusted. This reappearance of Lavinia Fountain troubled him. What kind of guardian had this woman been for the girl of seventeen, the child escaped from the nursery—innocent and confiding, unacquainted with evil? If Lavinia Fountain had been a good woman that lovely niece would have been so closely guarded that the breath of slander could never have touched her. She, and she alone, was responsible for the cloud that had darkened Fanny's name.

He was astir early after a sleepless night, and found Patrick O'Brien at breakfast in his comfortable parlour, and to that one friend from whom he had few secrets, he told all that had happened to trouble him.

"I'm very sorry. Ye know I've never played the raven. I was sorry when ye told me the wife ye'd chosen. Mistress Fanny is a sweet creature—a charming wife for a rich alderman, who'd let her spend his money and have her own way—a comfortable old fellow, who'd ask no questions and be told no lies, and who'd be proud as a paycock of his wife's pretty face and figure. But she was not the wife for you. She was just the very last woman in this world you ought to have chosen."

"Well, Pat, we have discovered our mistake—and we are parted for ever. But I want the parting to be an honourable and a friendly separation; and I want my wife to live like a lady for the rest of her days. If I have ceased to love her——"

"Ye never loved her."

"I have not ceased to be responsible for her fate. I am going straight to her when I leave you—and after to-day I may want your help."

"You shall have it—but remember, if it's foighting you're after, I can't be your second. My cloth forbids it."

"I am not going to fight. We will part with as little scandal as possible—and it will be for her to keep clear of slander in the future. I shall want you to help me in the financial part of the business. I can afford to provide for her—with comfort; but I shall have to make conditions. And it is there you must help me."

"I think you know I'd go a long way to help you, in any matter that touched your happiness."

"Yes, I know—I know."

They shook hands upon this, and Godwin left O'Brien to finish his interrupted breakfast.

A hackney-coach carried him to Notting Hill in less than an hour, but Lavender Lodge took some time to find. It was in a

rural lane leading out of the Uxbridge Road, a kind of doll's-house villa, with a classic portico, a garden of half an acre or so, and a pond over which there wept a willow. It was just the kind of house Fanny would admire—even to the purple glass in the drawing-room window, and the bright green door with a brass knocker—which carried out the doll's-house idea. The maid who opened the door had pink ribbons in her cap, but there was a certain slatternly touch in the midst of her finery that suggested the influence of Aunt Lavinia.

Godwin walked past the servant without a word, and found himself face to face with Miss Fountain, whose flustered countenance appeared out of an adjacent door as he entered.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Godwin? Pray come in. Poor Fanny has one of her headaches; but she'll come down to see you, if she is equal to it."

"I hope she will be within five minutes, madam, as I don't mean to leave this house till I have seen my wife; and I have to be at the theatre at twelve o'clock."

"Very well. I'll bring her down; but I warn you the poor child is hardly fit to leave her bed."

"I can go to her room, if she would rather see me there."

"I'll bring her down—but, oh, Mr. Godwin, don't be unkind to her. You ought to know how sensitive she is."

"She has been my wife for half a year, Miss Fountain," he said curtly.

Aunt Lavinia set his teeth on edge, and made him less kindly disposed to the woman for whom his pity had been so deep and tender, that he had mistaken it for love.

He was alone for some time, standing with his watch in his hand, calculating the minutes he had to spend before he must be on the stage, rehearsing and directing the rehearsal. Without official status, he had long been the sole authority in the production of the plays in which he acted. To-day the rehearsal was vital, since Jessie Vernon was to play Ophelia for the first time.

He heard the hurried footsteps of aunt and niece—heavy and light—in the room overhead. He had time to criticise his wife's drawing-rooms—two small rooms, divided by folding doors, which were open. The furniture from Hertford Street was there—and the Lavender Lodge drawing-room reproduced all that he had disliked in Hertford Street. The things which separately were choice and even beautiful, were made vulgar by juxtaposition. Every object was out of harmony with everything else.

While he was thinking this, he heard Fanny's voice at the door—high-pitched and angry.

"No, aunt, I must see him alone. I won't have you with me—you can't trust me? Nonsense!"

Godwin went quickly to the door—opened it, and drew his wife into the room—Aunt Lavinia's flushed face frowning at him.

"I have to talk to your niece, and I have no time for beating about the bush," he said sternly, as he shut the door upon the angry face.

"Now, Fanny!"

He held her by the arm, and she would have let her head fall upon his shoulder, but something in his countenance stopped her. She was again *la belle éplorée*, the Magdalen of many painters, with tearful blue eyes, and pale gold hair falling loosely over her white muslin gown—the blue of her eyes echoed in the ribbon that girdled the gown. She was just as child-like in her prettiness—just as ready to fall into his arms, as she had been that first day in Hertford Street, when he went to do a kind action, and sent the bailiff out of her house. She had lost none of the charms that had won him; but his heart was steel. He did not even pity her.

"Well, Fanny," he began gravely, "I am here to answer your letter."

"You are horribly angry! You hate me!"

"No, my dear. You have discovered your mistake. I cannot be angry with you for that. You thought you loved me—you thought you were capable of a great unselfish love—the love that can stand the wear and tear of life. You were mistaken on both points. And you find you can be happier without me."

"I was unhappy with you—but only because you did not love me."

"Did you give me time to love you? Did you come to me with a clean mind and a true heart? Was there not always a lurking thought of someone else? Someone who could have given you splendours I could not give—some one whose prestige would have fed your self-importance—made you a left-handed queen. Do you suppose I have never read your thoughts, Fanny? What was your encouragement of that fribble Arden but a hankering for the admiration of the fribble's master? Your hysterical outburst when we left Carlton House must have enlightened me, if I had never fathomed your mystery before. You wanted to be something better than an actor's wife—you wanted to rekindle the ashes of an old fancy—and to be again

what you were ten years ago, the favourite of the first gentleman in Europe. God help you, and all the women whom that pernicious phrase has deluded."

"Our marriage was a mistake," Fanny whimpered.

"It was a mistake that never would have been if you had not lied to me."

"Godwin!"

"I asked you a question—a question on which the fate of two lives depended. You might have saved us both from misery, if you had been honest, and told the truth. You answered with a lie, and I was weak enough to believe that you had been slandered; that you had been foolish, but not guilty. I know better now. Ten years ago the Prince was your lover. I shut my mind against the truth, till that man Arden came to my house. When you encouraged his visits, in spite of my protest, I knew what to think—from that hour you ceased to be my wife. I would have saved you from yourself—I would have been your protector, if I could—but from the day that suspicion became certainty I was no longer your husband."

"You were very cruel—you held me at arm's length. You would have taken me to Ireland, not as your wife, but as your prisoner."

"To save you from your own folly. You took your choice when you stayed in London. The tie was strained to snapping point, and you broke the last thread."

"And I am nothing to you now?"

"Absolutely nothing."

She burst into a passion of sobbing, she twisted her fingers in her loose hair and pushed it from her forehead as if she would have plucked it out by the roots, the lovely hair that she had been so proud of.

"Yes, I lied to you," she cried vehemently, in the midst of her sobs. "I loved you so madly that I risked my salvation for your sake. I loved you with all my heart and soul. Yes, George, I lied to you—I called my God to witness a lie—and He did not strike me dead. He who reads our thoughts and feelings could pity a creature whose heart was breaking for love. Yes, it was a lie. The Prince was my lover—my lover before I was eighteen."

Through her tears, in her distraction, her eyes glittered with defiant pride—as she looked her husband in the face, and confessed that she had deceived him.

"He worshipped me—I could twist him round my little finger.



He would have made me his wife, if he had not been married to Mrs. Fitzherbert and Caroline. He moved heaven and earth to win me—there was never a woman so pursued, and by such a lover—so brilliant, so accomplished, so fascinating, so noble—my King that was to be. He grovelled on the ground at my feet—he kissed the hem of my gown, kissed and cried over it; he stabbed himself with my penknife—when I swore I would never see him again—when I told him that I would go back to Cornwall, and live in some solitary nook where he could not find me. He stabbed himself! I saw his dear blood upon his white waistcoat. How could any woman stand against such love as that? I could not help myself. He was irresistible.”

“That will do. I don’t want any more of your sickening story. And now let us understand each other. You are my wife. Nothing can set either of us free. We are bound till death. The law would not release me. It would take no cognisance of your past history. All you have to do is to live like an honest woman; and for the rest of our days we shall be—legally—man and wife.”

“And I shall be a chain round your neck—your burden and your curse.”

“I will bear my burden. There are things that a man values more than happiness—his honour and his good name. You are here in your own house—and it remains with you whether it is to be an honest woman’s house, or a repetition of Hertford Street. If you mean to live a pure life in it, you may count upon an income that will maintain you in comfort—but I wish to God you could have a better companion than Lavinia Fountain.”

“Whom else can I have? She is my only near relation—the only creature that loves me.”

“Teach her to respect you, by respecting yourself. So long as neither Colonel Arden, nor his master, nor any of their like, crosses this threshold, so long as you lead a modest and reputable life, you shall have eight hundred a year from me.”

“You are always generous.”

“While you respect yourself, I will remember that you have been my wife—and the world shall be told no more than that we are parted by incompatibility of temper. Patrick O’Brien shall take charge of your affairs—pay you your income, and help you to keep out of debt. He is my best and closest friend—make him your friend, and take his advice in all your difficulties. Let him be your only counsellor. And now, good-bye.”

She fell on her knees, intercepting him as he moved towards the door. She seized his hand and kissed and cried over it—almost repeating his own business in Hamlet. Perhaps she remembered that scene as her facile tears fell upon the long, thin hand—perhaps she remembered that first night of their acting together, when she had been surprised, almost to bewilderment, by his talent and his success.

“My prince!” she gasped, “there was never anyone so generous or so noble.”

It was an unlucky epithet, and the long lip was lifted in a sardonic smile as he looked down at her, and gently withdrew his hand.

Miss Fountain stopped him by the hall door. She had been listening, but had heard very little. She took hold of his arm.

“You have not been cruel to that poor angel?”

“No, madam—but I have not a moment for discussion. My friend Mr. O’Brien will tell you all that you need know of my intentions and my desires. Good day to you.”

He had passed through the garden gate, and was getting into the hackney-coach before Miss Fountain had left off gasping in a speechless wonder. She had expected a different scene, and that he would have carried Fanny home in the hackney-coach—by force of arms—rather than give her up.

She found her niece sitting on the floor in a flood of tears.

“There was never anyone like him, the best, the grandest of men,” she sobbed. “Oh, if I had been worthy of him—if all that foolish past had been a dream! It seems like a dream now—I am alone in the world—nobody cares for me—nobody wants me. I wish I was lying at the bottom of the pond.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Fanny. You would only be wet and muddy. The pond isn’t two feet deep.”

All her young days seemed like a dream to Fanny, as she sat disconsolate in the Lavender Lodge drawing-room, while Aunt Lavinia pretended to be busy about her housekeeping—such a different housekeeper from methodical Sarah Merritt, who was always doing things without talking about them. As Fanny sat alone in the melancholy room, where no one had thought of lighting a fire, though the September day was grey and chill—that girlish past, the days of spending money and being admired, seemed just a glittering dream—a dream that she had fancied she could dream again. And now she sat lonely, face to face with reality.

She had dreamed of living that dazzling life again. Colonel

Arden had told her that she was lovelier, more entrancing, than she had been ten years ago—and that the Prince had asked questions, and had been interested in hearing about her—deeply interested—and angry with himself for not having recognised her at Carlton House, when he was talking to her husband, while she was on the other side of the room watching them. He was really angry with himself—but it was after supper, when a man is hardly so alert as earlier in the evening.

This kind of talk about the Prince's interest had been repeated so often that it had seemed to Fanny as if the reign of the handsome Marchioness must be threatened. That lady's charms were ponderous and unromantic; while Fanny was still the sylph who had played Juliet.

Poor Fanny's dream had come to a sudden end in the common light of day. An elegant and sentimental letter, dwelling kindly on old memories—written by a secretary—and signed "G."—"G." without the accustomed "R."—and enclosing a thousand-pound bank-note, had nothing of the glory of the dream that Fanny longed for. Her only pleasant thought to-day was, that with Godwin's promise of an income she could return the Prince's bank-note, while thanking him, with all grace and loyalty, for his kind letter. She had other letters with the same signature—letters in his own hand, and blotted with royal tears—such letters as that Prince Charming had written by the score, being from his earliest youth of a sentimental turn—and with a heart capable of everything except constancy. Perhaps if he had had a tender mother, and his father had been allowed to love him, and if he had been fortunate in a wife, he might have been a different man. There was always that to be said in his favour; and also, that, even as the man he was, there were a good many people who loved him.

Lady Beaumont was still in London. She was in her box with her niece on the first night of the season, and in that brilliant array of famous men and beautiful women, a night of diamond tiaras, of stars and ribbons, royal dukes and duchesses, that one serious face watching the stage was all that Godwin saw, with conscious mind and observing eyes. The rest of the dazzling semicircle was only a confused splendour. Harvey was stalking about the spaces between the stage and the green-room, in a fever of exultation. There was more money in the house than on any night in the last season; there was not an empty seat from the topmost gallery to the last bench at the back of the pit, and the boxes were full of people who had come from their country

houses, from their hunting and their shooting, to be present at the opening night of the autumn season.

Godwin was the fashion—that was what his brother actors were telling each other. It was not talent, or even genius, that could crowd a theatre with peers and politicians, peeresses and beauties—it was fashion. All the rich and the idle in London had made up their minds that Godwin was a great actor, and that to see him act was the right thing to do. Two or three duchesses, and half a dozen statesmen and poets, had gone about London proclaiming him a genius—and the sheep followed their leader. The simile of the rocket and the stick was repeated in the dressing-rooms, where the minor actors attired themselves; but certainly this particular rocket had been a long time in suspension, and seemed to be always shooting higher in the empyrean of success.

She was there, as she had been the first time his eyes beheld her—the same serious face—pale and full of thought. She had talked of Switzerland in September, on her way to a winter in Rome—she had talked of late autumn in Scotland; but she was still in London. His heart beat with a passionate gladness. But had she stayed only for this first night—stayed to witness his continued success—before leaving England for the winter—a long, desolate winter for the man who loved her?

No, she was not going away. He called in Spring Gardens early next day to make inquiries, and the butler told him that her ladyship was remaining in town for some time. Miss Montgomery was staying with her. Godwin left his card, after he had written a line in pencil: "I shall call this evening on the chance of finding you at home."

He was acting only four nights that week, and had this evening and another free—those were the blessed evenings when he might find her alone, or almost alone—and which were infinitely dearer than her Sunday *salon*, when she was surrounded with friends, the least of whom had some higher claim upon her attention than he had.

He was with her at nine o'clock—they two alone for an hour, Miss Montgomery having been taken to Covent Garden by another aunt to see Miss O'Neil as Isabella—and Malcolm Crawford also being out.

They were in the library, the room that had an air of intimacy which was wanting in the drawing-room, where the wider space, and a certain stateliness in the furniture, suggested a room meant for visitors. These walls lined with books—these writing-

tables, large Queen Anne chairs, and the sober colouring—had the unmistakable air of home.

“Your Irish letters were delightful,” she said, “but now I want to hear all the details that your letters did not give—you are too much afraid of being an egoist—you slur over the accounts of your triumphs. Tell me more about your Irish audience.”

“I have forgotten details. It was pleasant and inspiring while it lasted, but the end obliterated the beginning. I had bad news of my wife.”

“Was she ill? Not——?”

She had grown suddenly pale, and he could guess the word she could not speak. Her startled eyes questioned him.

“No, not even ill—but she is lost to me. I have no wife.”

“Has she left you?”

“Yes, she has left me. No, it is not an elopement. She has left me because she is tired of me—of my manner of life. She has no complaint to make—only that she ought not to have married an actor.”

“But she was an actress. She knew——”

“She had forgotten, when she married me—she is not a deep thinker—she does not look under the surface of things. She loved me—she was tender and sweet, and I was grateful—and we might have been happy, if she had chosen.”

They sat facing each other. Isabel's hands were resting on the table, the blue veins standing out upon the pearly skin. He could see her bosom moving under the folded muslin kerchief that was crossed above it, fastened with a single diamond that rose and fell as her breathing quickened.

“I am sorry for you,” she said at last in a low voice.

“You do not think I am to blame?” he said.

She gave him her hand, which was colder than usual.

“I am sure you are not.”

“She has a spinster aunt to whom she is much attached—and who I believe loves her—though she is a foolish old person that I should never have chosen for a guardian angel. They will live together in a small house to which my wife removed herself while I was in Ireland, and they will be comfortably provided for. My friend O'Brien will look after them, and can do more for them than I could.”

“Mr. O'Brien is your true friend, and you are wise to trust him.”

She had invited her friend's friend to her Sunday evenings—and they had talked long and intimately—or as long and inti-



mately as it was convenient to talk in a room full of people. The subject of their conversation had been the forty-shilling pupil—Patrick being no more ashamed of having taught the humanities for his shoe-leather than Godwin was of his boyhood among the brown tents.

The evening went on in talk about many things, and no more was said of the change in Godwin's domestic life ; but it seemed to him that this revelation of his wife's unkindness had drawn him nearer to the woman in whom sympathy was so intense a feeling. It was the first time that he had ever seen her agitated. Those signs of emotion were strange in one so exquisitely calm—but her agitation was gone in a few moments, and the only change, when they passed on to the other subjects, was a kinder and more familiar tone—as if their friendship had been made a closer bond by the fact of his wife's desertion.

Her brother came into the room while they were talking of his Irish experiences, and flung himself into an arm-chair remote from the other two, saluting Godwin with his usual aloofness—as if there were a world between them.

"You look tired, Malcolm."

"I am always tired. Life is a tiresome business—martyrdom for the poor—disappointment for the rich."

"You have been among your people to-day?"

"Yes—I have been with them all day, looking at miseries I cannot cure. Yes"—as if in answer to an unspoken question—"I have disposed of your money. It was received with rapture. They will wallow in food and drink for a week—and then they will starve again."

"You think such gifts are useless?" Godwin asked.

"Everything is useless—except the hospitals. Those are of some use. But what can a little money—now and then—do for people at whose door the spectre is standing all the year round—the spectre called Hunger? My sister is a rich woman, and she gives away half her income; but unless she could persuade all the other rich women in England to do as much, and unless among them they could teach the poor to be industrious and thrifty, and to go to Mass instead of going to the gin-shop, it is all hopeless—and she may as well take her pleasure in life—sit in the theatre to see you act—or in this room to hear you talk."

Godwin flushed to the temples—but Isabel was unmoved.

"Mr. Godwin's acting always interests me," she said, "and so does his conversation. Why won't you make a third some-

times, Malcolm? You have read so much, and thought so much, that you would bring a new force into our discussions."

"Shakespeare and the musical glasses," he said. "No, thank you. I was born under Saturn, and my thoughts are dark thoughts. Good night."

He nodded to Godwin and walked out of the room. It was his way to come there, once, or sometimes two or three times in the course of an evening—but nothing could reconcile him to the actor's intimacy with Isabel, and he took no trouble to conceal his dislike.

"You must bear with my brother," she said as the door closed behind him, "because he is unhappy."

"He is your brother; and that is enough."

"If I tell you how he has suffered, it will be easier for you to forgive him. You and I, who are close friends, must have no secrets."

And then, as she looked at him earnestly, he saw the blood mount to her cheek and brow. It was the first time he had seen her blush—and this blush was deep and lasted long.

"Malcolm disapproves of our friendship. He has done all that cruel words can do to spoil my pleasure in your company—to banish you from this house—which is my house, remember, George—not his. He tells me that people will say ill-natured things because you are here oftener than any other of my friends. And so they will, perhaps—and so they may," she said in a resolute voice—and the blush deepened as she raised her head with a sudden stateliness that became her. "He goes farther, and says this friendship of ours has cost me my good name. I don't believe him. I don't believe that people are so senseless or so malicious—certainly not the people who know me—but if it were true I would still be your friend, I would still delight in your friendship. I know my own heart; and I think I know yours—and I can afford to laugh at slander."

She gave him her hand, and he bent low to touch it with his lips. The kiss was so light that she scarcely felt it, but she felt his tears.

They sat in silence for some minutes, and then she talked to him of her brother.

"You know what I think of our Church, the Church to which my mother and father, and all the men and women of my race have belonged—the creed in which I was reared, the religion I love, my strong rock and my consolation. The Roman Catholic faith has been all in all to me—but I am not a fanatic—I would

leave every man to find his own way to heaven. Unhappily for himself, Malcolm is of a darker temperament. In his mind, to be outside the Roman Catholic Church is to be a son of perdition. A Protestant is to him a personal enemy. The finest character or the noblest life is of no account. He judges no man by his actions, by the good or evil he has done in the world. For him there is only one standard—implicit obedience and unquestioning belief. St. Omer may have had some influence—but wherever he had been educated I think he would have been the same boy—and the same man. From the time he began to think he dedicated himself to the Church. All his thoughts, all his hopes were centred upon the priesthood. Think of him—an enthusiast—a fanatic, if you will, and then consider what it was for such a man—in his twentieth year—to find himself thrust out of the gate—an outcast.”

“ But how ? I can hardly understand.”

“ He was cruelly used—there was a suspicion—unfounded—never formulated—never put in a definite shape that could be met by denial and trampled under foot. He was a probationer at a monastery on the Aventine Hill—you may have heard that, perhaps.”

“ Yes, I have heard that.”

“ Something terrible happened—one of the monks was found stabbed to death in his cell—a probationer—of about Malcolm’s age—exemplary—learned—accomplished—one of whom the brotherhood were proud. His death was a mystery never to be fathomed, but for some reason it threw a shadow upon my brother. In a community of three hundred he was the only alien—and he was the victim of a suspicion as cruel as it was baseless. He had loved the murdered man—they had been close friends. There was not a shred of evidence that pointed to Malcolm rather than to any other creature within those walls, but for some personal prejudice, some private dislike, my brother’s life was ruined. I won’t enter into details—I only want you to know the shadow under which he has lived—the bitter sense of injustice—and the reason I have to cherish him.”

“ It is like you to be sorry for him—yes—he deserves your compassion—but is it wise to make a companion of a man smarting under the sense of a great wrong—a man of melancholy temperament, and of that melancholy which often touches the borderland of madness ? ”

“ How dare you say that ? No, George, I have no fear for my brother’s reason. He has suffered a wrong that might have un-

settled a weaker brain—but he has risen superior to failure. I should like you to know what his life has been since his twentieth year—a life of devotion and of saintlike beneficence. He has brought more sinners back to the fold than many a priest of high repute in the Church that rejected him. In Italy, in England, and in Scotland, his life has been the same, a life of self-sacrifice and saintlike devotion. The pleasures that waste the lives of young men of fortune have never been his. Without a profession, without a father to exercise authority over him, he has trodden the path he chose for himself in the dawn of manhood. He has been a faithful servant of his God and of his Church. Knowing this, can you wonder that I love him ? ”

“ No, I do not wonder—but I fear. I fear that melancholy temper—which I imagine has been always the same—only deepened in gloom by the wrong he has suffered.”

“ Yes, he was never blest with what people call a happy disposition. His mother died when he was an infant—his father was not kind to him. Yet they should have loved each other better ; for they were of the same cast of mind. But let us talk of other things. Tell me more about your Irish friends.”

It was not easy to converse freely about trivial things after that dark story of the monastery on the Aventine—a crime so mysterious—the murder of a blameless youth who was supposed never to have had an enemy. In Godwin’s mind there was but one explanation of the manner in which Crawford had been dealt with. Why, among that community of over three hundred, should suspicion have fallen upon that one ? Why, unless it were because of some previous experience—some antecedent knowledge that the monks had of the Scotsman’s character ? Had there been indications of a strain of madness—that hereditary taint which the Duchess had talked about ? How could he imagine hereditary evil in the race from which she had sprung, she whose thoughtful face, of an exquisite serenity, was shining upon him as he brooded upon her brother’s history ? Somehow, reason with himself as he might, he could not shut out the idea that the monks had known more of their probationer’s character than they had chosen to publish to the world. For him the idea of Isabel’s close association with this dark spirit would be always a thought of fear.

But even fear was forgotten in those delicious evenings of confidential talk when he was with that cherished friend ; and he became accustomed to Malcolm’s melancholy face and watchful eyes—and tried his uttermost to gain his friendship. After

all, that dark suspicion might have been as groundless as Isabel believed it to be, and the young man might be nothing worse than a fanatic—whose toil among the outcasts of the city might be inspired by a sense of duty, and not by remorse for a horrible crime, done in an interval of madness. He listened with sympathy to all that Isabel could tell of her brother's childhood, the more than common love between them, from the hour when her mother's dying lips had shaped the words that asked the sister of nine years old to love and cherish the brother of three.

"I was a serious child," she told him, "very grave and solemn for my age. I idolised my mother, and I had known for a long time that she was soon to be taken from me. She was an invalid for more than a year before her death, and a year is a long time for a child. To me it seemed only natural that she should have told me to take care of my brother. My father was a difficult man to live with, and he had been stern and hard even in his treatment of that small child. He wanted obedience, submission, silence—all the things that children cannot give, and our home had been a melancholy home, even before the beginning of my mother's fatal illness. All the joy went out of my life when she was taken away. I had nothing to live for except the little brother whose arms her dear hands had put round my neck with their last earthly effort. I gave myself up to Malcolm, and was his companion and playfellow, his slave and his protector—I worked at his books when he had a tutor—helped him in all his lessons till he went to St. Omer; and this companionship was richly repaid. I was the only creature he loved, and he gave me all his heart."

A cloud came over her face, and she stopped abruptly. Godwin remembered what the Duchess had told him, and a jealous pang shot through his heart as he thought of that other love.

"There was a time perhaps when love became tyranny," he said, "a jealous love—coming between you and the chance of happiness."

"Yes—I had to keep my promise to the dead."

"At a heavy cost?"

"I had to sacrifice something. Don't speak of it, George. Old wounds are soon set aching. I am not complaining. I have had a tranquil life, and I have kept my promise."

"You are an angel and a saint."

"No. Only an obedient daughter. That was the great love of my life, George, the love of my mother, who died before I was



ten years old. I gave her the first-fruits of my heart, the best I had to give."

He remembered what Ursula Pentland had said of her—a cold-hearted woman—a generous, noble nature, but without passion—a woman of the old Roman mould.

After this conversation Godwin was especially courteous to Crawford; but nothing could bring him into sympathy with that gloomy spirit. He had to realise that friendship between him and Isabel's brother was impossible. A distant civility was all he could hope for; and he knew that under that silent and sullen demeanour there was the smouldering fire of jealousy. Malcolm seldom failed to appear in the course of the evening; but though he greeted Godwin more civilly as time went on, he hardly ever joined in the conversation, but would take a book at random from one of the tables—read for a few minutes, and then throw it aside—only to take up another shortly after. Yet while seeming absorbed and scarcely conscious that he was not alone, he would sometimes plunge suddenly into the conversation with some scoffing commentary or acrimonious argument.

And then, after an hour of silence, broken only by these discourteous interruptions, he would rise suddenly, and walk out of the room.

"He will go back to his books and write or read for half the night," Isabel said, the first time this happened.

And then she told Godwin how she always went to her brother's study the last thing at night, and sat with him, sometimes for a few minutes, sometimes for an hour, and that this was the pleasantest time they ever spent together.

"He is engaged upon a book—something abstruse and terrible that has absorbed him ever since he left Rome. It is an occupation and a consolation; but he has never talked to me about it, and I respect his reserve, and have never questioned him. I have seen sheets of manuscript torn across and flung upon the hearth, to smoulder among the ashes, and I sometimes think his book must be like Penelope's web. Some day perhaps he will confide in me; for he knows that I am interested in all that interests him. Never doubt the strength of my brother's affection for me, George, nor doubt my knowledge of his character."

"I do not question his love for you, but I fear the dark vein of jealousy that runs through it. Love with Malcolm is not a happy feeling—it is selfish and exacting. He would let no one else love you. He would rather see you miserable than happy in any other love. He would have rejoiced in your marriage with

that Roman Prince, the man you could not love, a marriage that would have gratified his ambition ; but do you think he will ever stand on one side, and bless your union with the man you do love ? ”

“ He will not be put to the test,” she answered coldly. “ I had a kind husband, who was my friend and companion in the best years of my life. I have done with marriage.”

Godwin was silent. It was one of those moments when words were dangerous. There were words that he must never speak—allusions, even of the lightest, that he must avoid—thoughts and feelings that he must die rather than reveal. From the day she offered him her friendship, reverence for her purity, consideration for her feelings, had become his religion. And from the hour she told him that she would submit to be evil-spoken of rather than cease to be his friend, that obligation was doubled. She had trusted him, and he had to prove himself worthy of her confidence.

The evenings they spent together were hours of ineffable happiness. Other visitors sometimes dropped in, her women friends, or the men whom she liked because they had been her husband’s friends, and hers, throughout her married life. These were ardent admirers of Godwin the actor, and had a genuine liking for Godwin the man. They showed no surprise at meeting him so often in Lady Beaumont’s house, but may have discussed this romantic friendship among their intimates.

“ She is as proud as Lucifer, but if the actor could get rid of his wife she would marry him to-morrow,” said one of these gentlemen. “ Unfortunately for him his pretty Fanny has not qualified for a divorce, and there is our interesting Godwin tied to a runaway wife—and consoling himself with a platonic attachment.”

“ Platonic ? ”

“ Yes,” sternly and with insistence, “ strictly platonic.”

This is what the friends who had known Isabel Beaumont for a good many years said and thought ; but there were more recent acquaintances who may have been less indulgent.

## CHAPTER XXV

MIDWINTER and the pantomime came round again, and the "Mother Goose" of last Christmas was to be succeeded by "The Babes in the Wood," in the procession of the seasons, with the same clown and almost the same harlequinade. The pantomime banished Godwin from that quiet haven in Spring Gardens, the peaceful evenings, the communion of thought between minds that had begun to think alike.

He had to leave London in the middle of December to fulfil provincial engagements made before Easter. He was to appear at York, and in other northern cities, at Plymouth, Exeter, and Bath, the towns whose streets he had trodden when his fortunes were at their lowest, when he had to act mean parts. That was always the painful memory—not his lack of the comforts and luxuries of life. Deprivations such as few young actors had suffered had gone lightly over his head; a bad dinner, or no dinner, mattered nothing; but a bad part meant despair, the awful sinking of the heart at the thought that he was never to succeed, that the years of apprenticeship were to stretch on for ever.

And now the time of slavery was behind him, and he was famous. Wherever there were people who knew their Shakespeare, people who loved a play, George Godwin was a familiar name. He walked the pavements that had been cruel to his only pair of boots, the cobble-stones of Norwich, the flags of Bath, rich, admired, invincible—flushed with the sense of power, yet not utterly happy; for she was not with him, the woman he longed for—the woman who could never be his wife.

He looked back and remembered that first London season—the ardour, the joy that thrilled through his veins, as he walked about the great city—when fame and gold were new; before he had begun to love—and love in vain. Ah, the difference! Could he ever again be as happy as he had been in that half-year? Would he ever again walk the earth with Mercury's winged sandals, as if he were treading on air?

His chief delight—as it had been in Ireland—was in pouring

out his thoughts to Isabel, in such letters as only lovers write, and only love can tolerate. For the rest, there was the theatre, and those unknown audiences whose applause had lost its old electric power, because she was not there.

To be dependent upon one mortal for all the joy of life ! That is what love means—and what Godwin was realising.

A tragic event interrupted the monotony of his thoughts. Lord Clontarf was dead. He had died by his own hand, to the horror of that vast public who had admired him in his zenith as one of the foremost men of the age.

Various motives were suggested for the fatal act. None among his friends had ever doubted his sanity, but they had known him subject for a long time to acute suffering from an incurable disease. Death within a year or two was inevitable, and for one who had endured pain with an almost Roman patience, it seemed strange that the courage that had marked his political career should not have sustained him till the end.

Godwin was inexpressibly shocked by the tragical death of this man with whom he had spoken only once, whose offered friendship—or something more than friendship—he had coldly put aside. Death sets life in a new light. His heart ached for this dead father, who might have loved him as a son, who had almost offered him a parent's love. He hated himself for the stubborn pride that had held him at a distance from a personage whose lightest notice would have been counted an honour by any other young man. He had too deeply resented the neglect which was perhaps inevitable under the conditions of his birth. It was not his father, but his mother, who had robbed him of his birthright. Had she been a different woman, his father might have acted differently. It was the woman who sealed his fate—the woman whose only anxiety had been to rid herself of a hateful obligation, and who cared nothing for the fate of her child. From the time Godwin heard Sarah Merritt's history of his birth, he had thought more kindly of his father ; but not kindly enough to try to undo what he had done in that brief interview in the theatre. But Lord Clontarf was dead, and that night's work was part of the irrevocable past. The cold looks, the hand withheld, were among the things that cannot be undone, the sins that make the aching memories of later life.

He broke his engagement to appear at Exeter, giving a money compensation to the lessee—and went to London, where he was among the crowd at Clontarf's funeral—recognised only by a few people. His mother was surprised by his return.

"I could not act while he was lying dead," he told her, and she understood him.

"That was like you, dear," she said quietly, and then with a sigh, "He was a great gentleman. I wish you could have known him better."

"Ah, one always wishes that—too late."

He spent the week in seclusion, and did not go near Spring Gardens. He felt that to be with Isabel would have opened the floodgates of emotion—and, although she had said they were to have no secrets, he shrank with unspeakable pain from telling her of the cloud upon his birth. In their growing intimacy he had told her more and more of his childhood—yes, even of Peggy and the van, the van that had been parlour, bedroom, and kitchen for him and his mother. He had told her of his childish industry, the mats he had woven with rushes from the Redbridge River, the clothes-pegs he had made from broken branches, gathered in the early morning after a tempestuous night, when he was often the first on foot in the wood. All those childish memories interested her, and his account of Sarah Merritt's devotion moved her deeply.

"Was there ever such a mother?" she exclaimed, and Godwin refrained from telling her that this woman who had so cherished him was not his mother.

Those humble details had no shame now that he was sure of Isabel's understanding and sympathy. To have been born in a labourer's cottage would not have been difficult to tell her—born in wedlock, of honest, God-fearing parents—but to own himself the son of a loose-lived actress and her aristocratic protector would be hateful. What of high principle, or right feeling, could she expect from such lineage?

Patrick O'Brien was surprised among his books late one evening by the appearance of Godwin, whom he supposed to be acting in Exeter.

"I took ye for your ghost," he said, as they shook hands. "What the deuce brings ye back to London, when you were to be raking in the guineas and deloighting the bumpkins in the west?"

"I was out of sorts, Pat, and I have given myself ten days' holiday. I am to begin an engagement at Bath on Tuesday, and must travel by the mail on Monday night, and be in the theatre for a rehearsal at eleven."

"And you've been kicking your heels in this town for a week, and made no sign. That was hardly civil."



"I've been resting."

"Well, I suppose you wanted a bit of quiet—ye look tired."

"Tired of life sometimes, old friend."

"No more of that, George. Draw your chair to the fire, and mix yourself a glass of punch. The water's scalding hot, and the whisky is the best ye'll taste out of Ireland. Ye'll be wanting to know how Mrs. Fanny is going on."

"Yes," Godwin answered in his low, grave voice, with thoughtful eyes gazing into the fire. "I shall be glad to know that she is well and happy. Have you seen her lately?"

"Less than a week ago. I took tea with her and the old lady. You must know that I have arranged to pay Mrs. Fanny her income in monthly instalments, which gives me the right to call upon her once in four weeks, and helps to keep her straight financially."

"And is she living quietly, and satisfied with her lot?"

"She is living quietly—no fine visitors—not much gadding about. She and her aunt go to a theatre two or three times a week—but that seems the extent of their dissipation. Without playing the spy, I have managed to keep myself acquainted with their manner of life—for me first duty is to me forty-shilling pupil, and it behoves you to know how she is living."

"I want her to live the life of a good woman—for her own peace and for my honour. Whatever happens, she has been my wife. I would have made her happy if I could, Pat. I meant to be a kind husband, to make sacrifices even; but not to hazard my career as an actor for any woman on earth. I wanted sympathy and understanding from a wife even more than love. But she could give me neither; and her love was like April sunshine that came and went in flashes, with storm-clouds between. Marriage, which should have made love perfect, killed her love. She was discontented, unhappy, harking back to the worthless things that had charmed her when she was a girl—harking back to a trumpery paradise that was made beautiful by distance. Our marriage was a mistake, and I dare say she suffered as much as I did."

"She did one kind thing for you, George, and you ought to be grateful. She cut the knot."

"Yes, she cut the knot. And I want her to be as happy as any woman can be whose life has been a failure—and, above all, I want her to keep clear of all past associations."

"No fear," said O'Brien, "the past won't trouble her. I've made myself certain upon that point, by a little conversation

with a lad from Limerick, who happens to be curate at the nearest church, and who takes an interest in his pretty parishioner. Mrs. Fanny has no fine gentlemen visitors—lives as discreetly as a cloistered nun—walks in the garden with a King Charles spaniel—plays the piano—and goes to the theatre in a hackney-coach with her aunt.”

“ I wish the aunt were a wiser woman. But we must be liberal, Pat ; we must be sure that they have enough to live comfortably and keep out of debt.”

“ I’ll answer for the living comfortably, but the keeping out of debt is a matter of honour and conscience, and it’s like the colour of a man’s hair—it’s born with him. However, I’ll do all that gentlemanly finessing can do to keep the two ladies clear of writs and bailiffs.”

This was the utmost that Fanny Fountain’s husband could hope.

He found a letter lying on the table, when he went into his library after midnight : a letter with a formidable seal, bearing the name of a well-known firm of solicitors, and heavy with an enclosure.

“ Sir,

“ We have the honour to inform you that the Will of the late Lord Clontarf, which was read in our office this afternoon, among other legacies bequeaths the sum of thirty thousand pounds Consols to you ; and we beg herewith to hand you the letter which his lordship left with us in October last, to be delivered to you after his death.

“ Awaiting your instructions, we beg to remain,

“ Your obedient servants,

“ GILLYAT, BROOKS & GILLYAT.”

In Godwin’s constitutional indifference to money, the legacy caused neither pleasure nor agitation ; but his hand shook as he opened the dead man’s letter. It was a letter that he could never answer, were it to move him ever so deeply—a letter that thrilled him like a far-off cry of pain—a cry out of impenetrable darkness.

“ My son, whom I would have made my very dear son, had he so willed.

“ I offered you my affection, George, and you refused it. Not many words were spoken, upon either side, but you showed

me your mind—you showed me a temper that did not know how to forgive ; and it was not in *my* temper to supplicate for pardon from the son I had allowed to grow up in ignorance of his parentage, and whose genius had filled me with ineffable pride.

“ I longed to have you for my friend and my companion, and to do all that the law would let me do to make you my heir, and all that my social influence could do to make you honoured as my son. I longed to tell you how it was your mother’s fault, and hers only, that you had never known a father’s care ; that it was only when you had sprung into sudden fame and fortune that she took the trouble to inform me of your existence. I wanted to tell you this ; but it was not in my character to humiliate myself. I could only meet pride with pride. I hungered for your affection ; but I saw the two faces in the glass, and on each was the stamp of the will that does not know how to yield.

“ Yet, as the years went by, bringing you an ever-growing fame—fortune, and troops of friends, I have wished that I had risen superior to all sense of my own importance, that self-esteem which men call dignity, and won you by a persistence that must needs have prevailed. For as those years of your golden youth went by, the sands were running low in my glass, and I had begun to suffer that horrible sickness of life which follows upon a public career that has not been entirely successful. I began to feel what it is to stand alone in the world ; to have no one about me who was the happier for my existence ; to know of no one who would be sorry for my death. I had enjoyed a certain fame in life, but I should be forgotten before I had been dead a month. I knew this, but it was not this knowledge that determined the act which, no doubt, will be ascribed to sudden madness. My disease was world-weariness—unconquerable sickness of life, and all it could bring me. I will not speak of merely physical pain, but when I tell you that I am suffering from a disease that would mean dying by inches, you will hardly wonder that I throw the wretched remnant of my life away. My public career has been a disappointment. I have been a strenuous worker, and have had great aims ; have been often near success, yet have never succeeded.

“ You have had a happier fate. You have given your life to an art that lies far away from the world of party strife, and the struggles of statesmen who pretend to be patriots while they are fighting for their own hand, men who would sacrifice the honour of a nation, rather than see their country saved by the rival they hate.

"I want you to know that you might have had a father's affection if you would—and I want you to know, so far as this letter can tell you, what manner of man I have been. Had your mother been a different woman I might have married her—and your position would have been different. But I doubt if Lord Clontarf's son and heir, perhaps first Secretary of Legation in Paris or Rome, would have had as brilliant a career as George Godwin, the successor of David Garrick. The world would have valued him less.

"You need have no scruple in accepting the legacy I leave you, and I entreat you not to reject it. I have no near relations, and I might have left you three times as much without injustice to my heir-at-law. I have heard that you are generous and even lavish in your use of money; and I wish my legacy to serve as a provision for the time when advancing years will oblige you to leave the stage, and you will be no longer a money-earning man.

"Farewell.

"C."

Godwin brooded over this letter for a long time. It was dated late on the night before Clontarf's death. In the early morning, before the house was astir, his valet had been startled by the report of a pistol, and had found his master lying upon the floor of his dressing-room, with a bullet through his brains.

To Godwin it was the letter of a man who was dead—and that thought moved him as nothing else in his life, except his love for Isabel Beaumont, had ever moved him. His heart ached for the father whose affection he had slighted. He had pored over the letter with his elbows on the table, and his tears had dropped upon the page. He started up suddenly and looked straight before him, seeing the face that he had looked at in the glass, the splendid eyes, with the yearning gaze in them. For a moment the man was there, the noble figure, in the blue coat thrown back from the white waistcoat, where the Star of St. Patrick hung from the broad blue ribbon. For one instant of passionate feeling, of inexpressible grief, the man was there, the living man who could forgive. The impulse was irresistible. He stretched out his arms with a faint cry of "Father!" before he dropped heavily into his chair with a sigh of profound regret. "Too late."

The man who should have been buried in Westminster Abbey was laid in an unconsecrated corner of a churchyard on the

north side of London. It was a rural burial ground, and the long level branches of an old yew stretched their dense foliage over the spot that no priest had blessed. Later there would be granite or marble, perhaps, over the raw earth; but Godwin's heart ached at the sight of that unhonoured resting-place. Godwin went there in the winter dusk, and laid a wreath of laurel on the new-made grave.

He walked back to London, thinking of his dead father, and of the woman he loved.

Isabel was right. Between such friends there must be no secrets. He would tell her everything. She should read the letter from the dead, and he would tell her how hard he had been, and how deeply he now deplored the resentful feeling that had come between him and the father who might have loved him. He would make his confession, even if it revolted her. What to him had seemed self-respect might to her seem a contemptible egotism, the vanity of a half-educated youth, intoxicated with sudden success. She could not think of him with more contempt than he felt for himself when he remembered the paltry pride which he had taken for a kind of Roman virtue. He had felt some compunction later when Sarah Merritt told him the story of his birth; for even then it was obvious to him that his mother had been his only enemy.

He was standing in front of the wood fire at nine o'clock that evening in the room where every object was beautiful to his eyes, beautiful and dear. The firelight flashed upon the rich bindings of books that had been Sir George Beaumont's only personal extravagance; a joyous light, with its life and movement, its caprices of sudden change from dark to brilliant. The sombre splendour of the velvet curtains, the dark reds and greens of the Oriental carpet, the mahogany chairs and tables, all gave an impression of restfulness—and only to be in that dear room calmed Godwin's nerves.

She was at home. He was going to see her. He listened for her footfall on the stairs. Every second the clock measured off brought her nearer. The door opened, and she came to him, hurriedly, ever so slightly agitated—or with a fluttered air that seemed agitation in her who was generally so calm.

"I thought you were two hundred miles away," she said quickly, as they clasped hands, and he could hear that she was breathless. "You were to act in Exeter this week. Has anything happened?"



" Yes, something happened a week ago, something that made me break my engagement."

" Something dreadful ? "

" Yes." And then seeing her look of horror, " But only indirectly affecting me. I am come here to tell you a painful story. You said there were to be no secrets between us—but I have kept this one. And now I have come to make my confession."

He was holding her hand still—and it was only now that she drew it away.

" Sit down, and let us talk quietly," she said. " I was startled when the servant told me you were here. You have been a week in London—and you have not come to see me. That was not kind. I missed your letters, and I have been very anxious."

" You will forgive me when you know all. I have been living in seclusion, seeing no one but my mother and O'Brien—writing to no one—going nowhere."

" But why ? What brought you to London ? "

" Lord Clontarf's death."

" Oh, what a tragedy ! There has been an epidemic of suicides in the last few years—noble lives have been thrown away—this was the worst of those tragedies. But what is it to you—more than to me, or to anyone ? "

" He was my father."

She turned deadly pale, and then after a silence she laid her hands lightly on his shoulders, and looked him in the face with a long, steadfast gaze.

" Yes, you are like him," she said ; and then under her breath, " I ought to have known."

" That my birth was a disgrace ? "

" That you had noble blood in your veins."

He gave a faint laugh.

" Does nobility count without a marriage certificate ? " he asked ; and then, sitting opposite to her in their accustomed places, he began his confession. He told her of the letter from the colonial merchant's wife—and of the interview in the rich, vulgar house. He spared neither himself nor the woman who had claimed him as her son.

" You were right, George. She had no claim."

He glanced at the door before he went on with his story.

" I hope we shan't be interrupted."

" I expect no visitors."

" But your brother ? "

" He is far away. He had one of his restless fits last week.

He started for Italy at a day's warning. We shall not be interrupted. Did the lady at Clapham tell you Clontarf was your father ? ”

“ No, she dealt in hints, and—I asked no questions. I was angry, with the sullen anger of years—and I wanted to know nothing.”

After this he told her everything ; the scene in his dressing-room, the suspicion aroused by the something strange and significant in Clontarf's manner ; and then the sudden revelation that flashed upon him at sight of the two faces in the glass. He did not spare himself. He told her of a nature that did not know how to pardon ; he told her how he had stood with the door in his hand, silent and resentful, and watched his father pass out of his life for ever.

“ I did not know,” he said. “ If I had only known what a heart there was under the star.”

He took the dead man's letter from his breast, and read it to her in a low, dull voice ; but his feelings were no longer under his control—all that he had felt in the first reading of that letter was intensified now that he was with Isabel, and his voice faltered more and more as he read, until it broke altogether, and he fell on his knees, at her feet, and hid his face upon her lap.

She laid her hand upon his head, smoothing the long loose hair. The touch was a caress, but only such a caress as friendship might give in a moment of supreme emotion.

“ My angel of consolation,” he said brokenly, seizing the caressing hand, and covering it with passionate kisses ; and then he sprang suddenly to his feet, and began to walk about the room, trying to get the better of his agitation. The light touch of her hand, and the low and gentle voice, should have soothed and calmed him, but the stormy beating of his heart, the tension of every nerve, were more than he could bear. He felt as if he were fighting with devils ; and it was not till he had paced the room for some minutes that he was able to go quietly back to his seat opposite Isabel.

She had been watching him anxiously, but had not spoken.

“ You are too sensitive,” she said. “ You must not torture yourself with this useless regret. I can sympathise with you, and I think I understand your feelings. He is dead, and he has gone beyond the reach of your pity and your love. You are unhappy, because you think he can never know your sorrow, never can pardon. Looking back must needs be agony for those who do not know how to look forward, whose hearts ache at the

thought of sins against the loved and lost—even the most trivial—but it is not so hard for us who know that death is not an inexorable barrier, but a gate that leads into the world of love and pardon. I know what you suffer now, my poor friend ; but I know that there will come a time when death will cease to be a thought of horror—when the life beyond will be as real as this troubled life we are living here. Oh, my dear George, how much happier I should be if you would look into that one blessed Life which is the key to all mysteries, the cure for all sorrows, the life that conquered death—the life of the Son of Man who was the infinite and everlasting God.”

Their talk after this was of the things Godwin could not believe—the things he loved to hear her talk about. He was her disciple ; and the things that were lovely to her were lovely to him—but there was always the same questioning spirit—always the fear that the dream was only a dream.

In all that was said about Clontarf’s letter there had been no word spoken of the legacy. It was only when he was leaving her that he stopped on the threshold to ask :—

“ What am I to do about that legacy ? ”

“ You must do what he wished—accept it.”

“ So be it. I shall be able to do better for those I leave behind me. My mother has an annuity that would hardly allow her such surroundings as she has now, and what I have to leave would not give my wife the income I am allowing her.”

“ Why do you talk like that ? You are not going to leave them. Your mother is getting on for sixty, and your wife is older than you.”

“ Who knows ? Lives are not measured by years, but by living.”

“ True,” she answered sadly, as she looked at the pale forehead, the thoughtful eyes, and mobile brows.

With him life had been intense—the life that has no intervals.

“ You must try to live less like the spirit of perpetual motion,” she said, smiling at him, as they clasped hands. “ If I could prescribe for you I would order you a year in the cavern of the seven sleepers.”

“ And when I came out there would be a new actor at Drury Lane, and my occupation would be gone.”

“ And could you not live without a stage and an audience ? ”

“ Only under one condition—and that ”—with a long sigh—“ an impossible one.”

“ Are you coming to-morrow evening ? ”

" Sunday ? You will have a lot of people ? "

" Yes, I am to have more of a party than usual. Vincent Marlow, the coming man in the political world, is to be here, and I shall have your friend the Duchess of Pentland."

" I thought she was in Scotland."

" The Duke was not able for the journey, as she told me, in her dear Scottish way. They are going north in the spring if he is stronger. You had better come, George. There will be some interesting people."

" Your diamonds are magnets—and they draw the light spirits. I am heavy matter among those brilliant butterflies."

" Don't fish for compliments, but come. Good night."

## CHAPTER XXVI]

GODWIN breakfasted with his mother early on Sunday morning after a short and troubled night. Sarah was distressed to see his pallid face and the dark lines under haggard eyes—but she refrained from doleful remarks. Those meals in the library with only his mother and his dog were always comfortable—always made a restful pause in his day. With Sarah he could talk or not talk as he liked ; he had no questions to answer ; no fear of little querulous outbreaks, such as he had been subject to with his wife. The girlish face and bright blue eyes, the golden hair that caught the sunbeams, were gone—but in their place there was peace—perfect content, and the silence that is sweet to the man whose thoughts are deep.

He told his mother of Lord Clontarf's legacy, and that he was not going to repudiate the gift.

" You are right," she said. " He was rich, and always generous. He was a great gentleman. If your mother had only treated him better ! She thought her handsome face was to carry her through the world, and that his lordship would never get tired of her. She tried his patience, I can tell you ; and as the time went by after their quarrel she knew she had lost him. And then, when you came, her only thought was of getting back to the stage, and making a grand marriage. That was what she had set her heart upon. She was always talking of Miss Farren, and Miss Mellon, and the great matches they had made."

Lady Beaumont's drawing-rooms wore their gayest air when Godwin arrived. Cedar logs were piled high in both fireplaces, and the great crystal chandelier in the larger room flashed with rainbow light. Godwin's eye ran round the room while he exchanged greetings with a group of men near the door. Sofas and chairs were occupied by women, mostly handsome, always handsomely dressed, and there was only standing room for the men.

Lady Beaumont was in a group near the fire, surrounded, and did not see Godwin's entrance. He knew most of the people,



but there was one whom he had seen only in the House of Commons, on the occasion of a stormy debate, the man Lady Beaumont had spoken of on the previous night, a man who had come to the front rather suddenly, and had been talked of as a future leader, a man conspicuous for many reasons—a fine debater, eminently handsome, rich, and the representative of an ancient race. The sort of man about whose affairs people like to speculate, asking each other when he is going to marry, or if there is anyone good enough for him among recent *débutantes*, or why he doesn't take a peerage, since he is more than rich enough to support one.

The answer to this last question came easily. Vincent Marlow was of more use to his party in the lower House than he would ever be in the Lords. He was too valuable to be kicked upstairs.

Godwin had never met him in that house before—and it was with a vague sense of trouble that he saw him talking to Isabel Beaumont, talking with the buoyant gaiety of a master in the art of trivial conversation, sure of being able to interest and amuse.

"Why are you standing at gaze, Godwin? You look more of a dreamer than ever," said a kind voice near him, and he turned to find his duchess at his elbow.

"I was watching Marlow's light-comedy conversation."

"Light comedy! Yes, he is something of a comedian—but his proper stage is the House of Commons."

"I am told he is going to be famous."

"He *is* famous. He took his place in public life while another man would have been thinking about it. He is like Robespierre, and is sure to go far, because he believes in himself. He came armed cap-à-pie. A double first at Oxford, a large landed estate, and an attractive manner."

"Handsome too?"

"All the young women think so, but his face does not interest me. His good looks are too obvious, too much a question of line and rule. If one hints a fault, women say, 'Oh, but look at his nose—and how fine his eyes are, and he has a chin like the Belvedere Apollo.' There is nothing subtle, nothing that comes in flashes and startles one. A countenance to be interesting should have surprises. I want to scold you for not coming to see me, and for other things. There is a seat in that window yonder, where we can talk as if we were in a wood. And you must have lots to tell me about those provincial theatres."

He followed her to the remotest of the five long windows—and

they sat side by side in that deep embrasure where it had been Malcolm Crawford's fancy to sit aloof for a whole evening.

"And now, Hamlet, 'words, words, words.'"

"Alas! I have very little to say that is worth listening to, dear Duchess. Hector is well—and my English experiences were humdrum after Ireland, and not half so interesting as Edinburgh."

"Your voice has a minor note to-night, and you are looking depressed. What evil thing has been happening?"

"To me personally, nothing. Lord Clontarf's death must have shocked everybody."

"Yes, that was a tragedy. Did you know him?"

"I met him only once in my life."

"His death was a terrible shock—but he had outlived his popularity."

There was a pause, and she looked at Godwin thoughtfully for a few moments.

"I am always finding chance likenesses," she said, "but it's strange that I never saw this one till now. You are like Clontarf."

"Indeed?"

"Did you never hear that before?"

"Not to my recollection. A good many things are said by the people one doesn't listen to."

"I know you are often in the clouds. But to-night you look unhappy. Is it because of what people have been saying about Isabel? Oh, you poor wretch! What a ghastly face! You would not take my warning. You have been playing with fire."

"What are they saying?"

The words came hoarsely from dry throat and lips.

"That she is going to marry Vincent Marlow."

"The man or the woman who said that was a liar."

"It was not a man or a woman. It was everybody."

"And everybody is generally a liar."

"How can you venture to be positive?"

"Because if it were true she would have told me."

"She would have told you if the thing were settled. She will tell you when she has made up her mind. She is not bound to tell you while she is thinking about it."

"She is not thinking about it."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because I have put my trust in her, and she will not deceive me. She is the soul of honour."

"You talk as if you had a sovereign right over her thoughts as well as her actions."

"I have the right of friendship—I have no secrets from her, and she has no secrets from me. We are friends."

"Everybody knows that, Godwin; but perhaps you don't know how much harm that romantic friendship has done her, how much of the world's respect your devotion has cost her. In London no woman of position can be romantic without paying for her romance. You have been too much in this house—the people who meet you here have indulged in the usual innuendoes—have shrugged their shoulders, and lifted their eyebrows, and nodded and smiled. It takes no more than that to kill a handsome woman's character. So for my own part I hope she will accept Marlow, and that you will appear at the wedding and sign the register, and give Isabel's traducers the lie."

Godwin sat with his elbows on his knees and his face hidden in his hands while she talked. Not a muscle moved as he sat like a man made of steel—but he was speechless, and the veins stood out like whipcord on the long, lean hands that covered his face.

The curtains that had shadowed Crawford's sullen brow screened Godwin and the Duchess, and their voices had been too low to attract observation. When strongly moved, his voice was always grave and low.

The silence lasted for what seemed a long time, and Ursula Pentland's heart ached for her protégé.

She laid her hand gently on his shoulder, and bent over his bowed head.

"My dear young friend, be brave. You would not listen; you would not understand. You have been playing with fire, and you must not wonder if you are scorched."

"Consumed—burnt to ashes."

"You have had her friendship. That was what you asked for."

"I have had her love," he whispered, with his face still hidden.

"It is shameful of you to say that," the Duchess said indignantly; "you will make me hate you."

"Do you think there is no love but guilty love? She is pure as the angels are—without passion, and incapable of sin—she is a saint—not a fanatic like her brother, but deeply, intensely religious. But for all that she loves me. She does not know—she thinks we are only friends; but she loves me. If I were not sure of her I should want to kill that arrogant beast over there."

He had lifted his head now, and was looking at Vincent Marlow,

who was standing in front of the fire, talking with tremendous animation, and listened to by a circle of admirers. Ministries, perhaps thrones, were going down under that torrent of words. He was disposing of Canning, he was destroying Spanish America. Lady Beaumont was not among his audience. She had seated herself by the piano, where Harry Elliot had begun to run his fingers over the keys, so lightly that his music made no difference to the people who were there only to talk.

Godwin saw her eyes wander to the spot where he sat in deep shadow. She knew that he was there.

"She will never marry him," he said.

"That is a pity. She ought to marry. She is too young and handsome to live single without compromising herself. She ought to marry; and she could not make a better choice than Marlow. He is in every way suitable—a man of unblemished character."

"What do women know of any man's character?"

"I thought I knew you," said the Duchess sadly, "but I may have been deceived. To-night you have scared me. Well, we mustn't sit here any longer. Put on your society face, and come and talk to people."

He obeyed her, and came out of the shadows into the warm light of wax candles and glowing logs. His kind duchess watched him uneasily, but his face was calm, and there was only the feverish brilliancy of his eyes to indicate strong feeling. He made his way to the piano, and Lady Beaumont rose to receive his greeting.

"What have you and the Duchess been talking about in that dark corner?" she asked, as they shook hands.

"The political situation," he answered lightly, "and a little about that loquacious gentleman yonder. I am told that Mr. Vincent Marlow is to step into one of the empty places, that he is to be one of the few who make history."

"The men you are jealous of," she said reproachfully.

"Can you wonder? The men who do things make an actor feel a worm. Consider what a paltry life it is to go on year after year in a sham world, dependent upon the applause of a two-shilling pit for the breath of one's life."

The Duchess rapped him on the shoulder sharply with her shut fan.

"I wish I had something harder to hit you with when you talk that egregious nonsense," she said. "You know that it is pure affectation—and that you think there is no greater man in London than you on your Hamlet nights. You would not ex-

change the roar of applause at the end of the play-scene for the biggest success in the House of Commons."

"Hush, Duchess, let us sit quietly and listen to the music," said Lady Beaumont. "Now, Harry, give us some of your improvising."

"You mean memorising. You are kind enough to like my scraps of old-fashioned melody, my nosegay of cut flowers. Some people think they are too faded to be sweet."

The young man's face had a dreamy look, as his fingers moved over the keys, touching them as if they were living creatures. He was not playing as the ordinary pianist plays. He was weaving a web of music, a flowing arabesque of melody, gliding with such graceful modulations from theme to theme that the familiar airs stole upon the ear and never startled it. From Mozart to Purcell, from Purcell to Bishop, and from Bishop back to Haydn. There was delight for anyone who cared to listen, though the music was too subdued to disturb the talkers.

One strong voice at least was silenced. Vincent Marlow had broken through his girdle of listeners and had made his way to the piano, where he took his place behind Lady Beaumont's chair. He was bending over her, talking in tones so low that they need not disturb the pianist; yet Godwin's keen ear heard every syllable.

The words might mean very little—but the expression of the man's face, the tone of his voice, were enough. He spoke as a man speaks only to the woman he loves. There was adulation in every note of that expressive voice.

Godwin stood straight and still, as if absorbed in the music, and unconscious of other things; but his eyes never wandered from the faces of the man who talked and the woman who listened.

Was he charming her, this eligible suitor?

"Heaven help me," thought Godwin; "he is as good an actor as I am."

There was a movement among the people, and the crowd was thinning. The Duchess touched Godwin's arm.

"Somebody has been whispering supper, and everybody is on the move," she said. "You had better take me downstairs while there is a chair and a chicken to be had."

Godwin stared at her with unseeing eyes for a moment before he offered her his arm. Harry Elliot, who was playing "Drink to me only with thine eyes," stopped. Lady Beaumont had risen,



rather suddenly, just as Marlow's head had been bent nearer to her own and his voice had sunk to a whisper.

He drew back a step, and offered her his arm, which she took with a certain aloofness.

"Are you going down with Mr. Godwin, Duchess? Come with us, and we will make a *partie carrée*."

Godwin smiled, but nothing could bring back the colour to his face. That ashen hue would have been conspicuous in a man who was not always pale; but perhaps it was only Isabel Beaumont who saw the ashen hue that was different from his habitual pallor.

"You are looking horribly ill," she whispered, as they stood side by side in the crush on the landing, where the people coming upstairs and the people going down made a block—and then with a movement imperceptible in the crowd, she gently pressed the hand that hung loose at his left side.

Just that touch was enough. He turned with a smile that was like a flash of light.

"You are not going to marry that man," he whispered, as the Duchess elbowed her way to the last flight of stairs, carrying Godwin in her wake, and leaving Lady Beaumont and Marlow to follow them.

The little party of four was the gayest in the room. The politician and the actor fought a battle of wits; and the actor had the best of the fight. To have Shakespeare and the finest of the Elizabethans by heart is a good stock-in-trade, and everybody knows how an apt quotation can sparkle.

Godwin's eyes shone with the light of a brain on fire. That little pressure of a kind hand had inspired him. She loved him; and she would love no other man. He was sure of her love, which she called friendship—pure and passionless—but love, all the same. He was sure of her.

He was telling himself this while Marlow's fine eyes were worshipping her, while the liquid tones of his voice were breathing love. They were talking of the pictures at Somerset House—but what did the subject matter? Love was in his eyes and in his voice. Certainly the man was handsome, the man was attractive—a dangerous rival for a lover who was not sure.

The supper-room was nearly empty. People had been crowding to Lady Beaumont's table to say good night. She was standing to receive their adieux, with Marlow at her elbow; and Marlow was still there when Godwin and the Duchess took leave, she insisting on taking him home in her carriage.

"Out of my way? Nonsense! It will do the horses good to go round by Bloomsbury."

"Even if it takes them through Seven Dials?"

"I shall like to see Seven Dials on a Sunday night. Poor things"—with a sigh—"no chicken and champagne for them."

Even with his restored confidence Godwin hated leaving that man so firmly rooted to his stand near Isabel. He had nothing to say to his duchess when he was seated by her in the roomy chariot.

"Well," she said at last, "you behaved beautifully at supper. You are wise, my dear Godwin, and have resigned yourself to the inevitable."

"I see nothing inevitable in the situation."

"Did you ever see a man deeper in love than that man?"

"His state is obvious. Pray, how long has this fire been burning? Such a conflagration cannot be the work of a day or a week."

"You have not been in the way of hearing small talk—or you might have heard how persistently he has been pursuing her—riding by her carriage in the Park—never missing one of her Sunday parties—assiduous in every hour he could give to the chase—and, as you know, his hours are golden. The people who have been witty about your platonic friendship have had plenty to say about Mr. Marlow's infatuation. It will end in a marriage, they have said, because he is going to be a great man, and she will be glad to get out of her entanglement with the actor. And then someone else says, 'She is too fond of Godwin to marry.' 'Cela n'empêche pas,' says the other. 'Hamlet can still be her *cavalier servente*.'"

Godwin writhed as he listened. What a hateful world to live in! That sweet association which had seemed so fair, malevolent tongues could make loathsome.

He would have given his life to save her an hour's pain—and he had brought discredit upon her by his love.

"She will never marry him," he said.

"My dear young friend," said the Duchess, "you are neither a coward nor a fool. The time has come for courage and wisdom."

She laid her motherly hand upon his shoulder, and there were tears in her voice. "You know how warmly I esteem you—and how much your genius has been to me—how much of interest and delight. But I have been unhappy about you in this last year—because I knew you were risking a good woman's reputation and your own peace of mind by a line of conduct

which no one could hold guiltless. The situation was becoming impossible; and, deeply as I feel for your distress, I am glad that the end has come."

"A friendship like ours has no end but death."

"It must end if Marlow wins her—and he will win. A man as much in love as he is can make a woman love him. He has every advantage. First of all he is a papist. Isabel would never marry a man, nor do I think she could love a man, who was not a Roman Catholic, who did not believe as she believes. Has she ever talked to you of religion?"

"Yes, we have talked. How could we be together, and not talk of things she cares for?"

"And she knows——?"

"She knows that I am hopeless—outside the pale of any Church—that for me Christ is no more than Socrates or Confucius—only the most divine of men."

"Then for her it would be impossible to love you. I know something of her mind."

"But do you know her heart?"

"In that kind of woman the mind rules the heart. My dear friend, prepare yourself for the shock. Whatever she thinks now, she will end by marrying Marlow, who is worthy of her from every point of view—birth—station—creed—and all the attributes of the man who succeeds."

"He will not succeed here."

"Oh, Godwin, why will you deceive yourself? The blow will be heavier when it falls. Be generous. She has been too kind; but I told you when this unwise friendship began that it was you who would suffer—you who would have to pay the price. You defied fate then."

"I defy fate now," he said hoarsely—and the Duchess knew that he was shedding those scalding tears that come from a heart on fire with jealousy.

No other word was spoken till the horses stopped in front of Godwin's door—when he stooped to kiss the Duchess's gloved hand, before he alighted, and stood in the street bareheaded as her carriage drove away.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THERE was no sleep for Godwin that night—neither sleep nor rest. There had been some talk among the Committee of producing Byron's "*Manfred*," published within the last year, and the tragedian had been asked to be prepared, in case the play were to be staged at short notice. The poet had told them that his poem was not meant for the stage—that he did not want to have it acted—but his associates in the theatre were of opinion that his lordship would be offended if they took him at his word. It might not be a good acting play—but it was a fine poem; and if the critics condemned it, and people of ton talked enough about it, there would be every chance of a success—especially as the part seemed made for Godwin.

"He *is* *Manfred*," Byron said, when someone asked his opinion.

The character appealed to Godwin as no other part had done since Marlowe's *Faustus*, which he had studied, but never acted, the feeling in the theatre being averse from the experiment. All that was mysterious, metaphysical, and unreal in *Manfred* charmed him. To-night, disturbed, unhappy, tortured with jealous doubts of the woman he adored, he could still lose himself in that dream-world—still wrench his thoughts from his own gnawing grief to suffer with *Manfred* that hopeless love in the past, that agony of remorse in the present, that wild endeavour to escape from human passion into the region of the supernatural. In that hour's respite the reality of life was blotted out. Isabel was as much a phantom as *Astarte*—the visionary love he longed for, and might never have.

It was only when the first streak of wintry dawn fell across the floor that he flung the open book from him and came back to the actual world, the world in which a man, with every chance in his favour, was trying to rob him of the woman he loved.

"He shall never have her," he muttered between his set teeth, as he rang for his valet. "It shall be a duel to the death, Vincent Marlow. It shall be the world well lost for my *Astarte* and me."

He got himself out of his evening clothes in a fever of haste ; but his cold bath calmed his nerves, and he allowed Renshaw to be as careful as usual in dressing him. An inestimable servant, Renshaw, who had the pride of an artist in his master's appearance, and took as much pains about the folding of a neckcloth as if he had been dressing the first gentleman in Europe.

Godwin's toilet was made by candlelight, and it was only seven o'clock and still dark when he went out into the cold morning, without touching the coffee and roll which Renshaw had prepared for him. His dreamy look, and his automatic movements frightened his valet.

London looked vague and shadowy in the morning fog, a dream-city to a man who was moving in a dream of despair and death. There was always the river—the silent haven for insupportable grief—there was always the apothecary—who in those days did not question Romeo too closely. Yes, there was always death—but for this man it was life—more life—he wanted—life and love. He was young—and his blood was on fire with his youth, with a love that had never been satisfied. His wife had been nothing to him—only a mistake that he had tried to make the best of. He had been satiated with sweet words and fond caresses—but he had never loved until he knew Isabel Beaumont ; and now that he had to face the possibility of losing her, that passion of love—intense and concentrated from its beginning—became a consuming fire that threatened his reason.

He never knew by what streets he found his way to the Park—but he knew that he had walked faster than usual—for the Abbey clock was chiming the half-hour as he crossed the Mall. Half-past seven. He must see her that morning—but this was too early. He must get rid of an hour or so before he went to her house. He would walk in the Park till nine. There was no one to look at him or wonder at him in the thick mist. The people who passed him were shadows ; and for them he too was a shade, without form or meaning.

That hour and a half seemed an eternity of thought—the same thoughts repeating themselves in his brain with the same words. She must not marry Marlow. It was for him to prevent that sacrilege. It was for him who knew that he had her love. He knew. He had watched her face too closely in those precious hours they had spent together not to be able to read the secret of her heart. She might not know that she loved him. For her calm temperament friendship and love were almost the same ;



but he knew by what subtle changes friendship had become love—passionless, but not the less intense.

He walked backwards and forwards by the long stretch of still water—that which was once the Decoy. He listened for the striking of the clocks. St. Margaret's, the Abbey, the Horse Guards; and at the ninth stroke he hurried to the little iron gate that led to Spring Gardens.

The footman who opened the door stared at him as if he had been a ghost.

He walked into the hall without a word—the man moving aside reluctantly.

“Her ladyship has not left her room, sir.”

“I must see her.”

“Will you wait in the library, sir? There is a good fire. Her ladyship will breakfast at half-past nine.”

The man stared aghast as Godwin hurried past him, ran upstairs, past the drawing-rooms—where doors and windows were open, and housemaids were at their work—mounting by three steps at a time to that upper floor where he had never been.

The door of her room, half boudoir, half dressing-room, was open, and he saw the bedroom beyond it, the high white bed, the white walls, an all-pervading whiteness. He saw it all in a flash before her maid shut the door. “Cold as thy chastity,” he thought.

She was standing before her toilet-table, tall and straight in her long white morning gown, and she gave a faint cry as she saw his face in the glass, then turned and found him standing near the door, bareheaded and deadly pale.

“What is the matter, George? What brings you here at such an hour? Has anything happened?”

“Yes, something has happened.”

“What is it? You look like a ghost.”

He had shut the door behind him, had thrown off his fur-lined coat. All Renshaw's pains in dressing him were of no avail against his distracted mind. His loosened cravat, his roughened hair gave him the aspect of a madman.

“Isabel, since I left you I have spent a night in hell—a night of madness. I have been wandering in a labyrinth of horror from which there is only one escape—oh, my queen, my angel, for two years you have given me all that I have ever known of joy and love. I have been your slave, your happy slave, thinking only of you, living only for you. We have called

it friendship—but on my side it was love. And now your friends tell me you will marry—I see a man pursuing you—a man accustomed to conquer—a man determined to win you—and I come to put your love to the test.”

“ You have no right to speak that word,” she said indignantly, with her head high. “ It was forbidden when I gave you my friendship. You were bound by an unspoken vow. Honour should have kept you silent.”

“ I have kept that tacit promise. While I had no rival I could be happy—grateful for kind looks, the sound of a beloved voice—and my love was unspoken. But silent now? Now, when I am threatened with a rival—now, when to stand aside and strangle speech is to let another man win you? No, Isabel, that is beyond me. No other man shall talk to you of love while I am dumb.”

“ You forget that you have a wife, and that every word you are saying is an insult to me. You are behaving atrociously, sir. I have hazarded my good name for your sake—I have laughed at slander—I have been proud of your friendship—strong in my assurance of your honour—and now you drop the mask and show me how I have been cheated. I see you are no better than other men—and that you think me no better than other women. You have made me hate you.”

Her face had blanched at his coming—but now it was flushed from cheek to brow, crimson with insulted pride.

“ I trusted you,” she said in an altered voice.

She clasped her hands before her eyes, to hide her tears—but her head was high, and the passion that convulsed her trembling lips was not love, but anger.

“ Isabel,” he began in a low voice, resolute and unfaltering, “ we have come to the parting of the ways. We have to choose—whether we are to live for the world—for the good opinion of the mob—or to live for ourselves and to be exquisitely happy. Oh, my dearest, my dearest—yes, it is true, I have cheated you. As your friend I was a cheat and a liar. I have been your lover all the time—your lover, dear, loving you beyond love and beyond reason. Words of fire burnt my heart and trembled upon my lips—and I have been dumb, and thought myself an honourable man—an honourable martyr! And I would have gone on to the end, would have died with my hand in yours, and friendship’s calm farewell upon my lips—if no other man had come between us. But the other man has come—and you must choose between him and me.”

"You are raving—I have no idea of marrying Mr. Marlow—or any man."

"But Vincent Marlow means to marry you. He is the strong man—the man born to conquer. You will belong to him or to me. Oh, my angel, why should we not be happy—what is there in this world to keep us apart? We are young—our lives stretch before us in a long perspective. Let us be happy. The Creator who made man, infinite in capacity, in apprehension like a god, never meant him to be a slave to the machine called society—or to the laws that men have made for a yoke upon rebellious necks. I am free—just as free as Marlow is. My wife left me of her own accord—and all she wants from me is an income. I am rich—and this wide beautiful world lies at our feet—we can go where we like—live as we like. I will leave the stage to-morrow, if you bid me—the art that I have lived for is nothing to me now—worthless—not to be considered. I live for you—only for you."

His speech had been a torrent of words, utterance so impassioned that syllables were sometimes missed—as in the speech of a drunken man. He had been standing two or three paces from the spot where she stood erect, looking at him with lightning flashes from offended eyes. But now with a swift sudden movement he had her in his arms—he was straining her against his heart. That delicate shape, alive and warm, was pressed against his own, their hearts so near that he knew not which beat quickest. In that delirious moment she was his. Could there be closer union? No matter that she was straining every nerve to release herself—no matter that her eyes were streaming with angry tears. For that moment he was mad with a divine madness. For that moment she was his.

"Now marry that other man if you dare," he said, as she tore herself out of his arms.

She stood a little way off, looking at him with withering scorn upon lips that trembled, and horror in the wide grey eyes.

"Go!" she said, pointing to the door. "From this hour we are strangers."

Could he ever forget her as she stood and faced him, tall and straight in her long white gown, and waved her hand towards the door? "Go!"

Only that monosyllable. Never more sweet speech from those lovely lips—or kind looks from those splendid eyes.

He had set his fate upon a cast—and lost.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

GODWIN was at Exeter. He had disappointed his audience in that city once—he could not disappoint them again.

A famous actor is the slave of his success. He is king in the dramatic realm, but, ill or broken-hearted, he must keep faith with the public who have crowned him. The play was “Richard the Third,” and never had Godwin acted with more force, or been received with more enthusiasm. He acted like a man whose blood was on fire, and the tremendous passion of the last scene roused his audience to a tumultuous demonstration.

Miserable as he had been ever since the fatal interview that had lost him all he valued in life, there were moments of exultation as he stood on the stage listening to the clamour of the close-packed pit, and seeing the waving handkerchiefs, the applauding hands, in every part of the crowded theatre. For a moment it seemed to him that *this* might be worth living for: just to lash himself into the fury of the royal boar at bay—just to lose all sense of his own existence in the passion of the scene, and to be applauded to the skies, while he stood panting and exhausted, with his broken sword in his hand, and still believed himself Richard Plantagenet.

To-night the illusion of the scene, which had always been stronger with him than with one actor in a thousand, had been almost hallucination.

“If I were to feel like this every night I should be a madman before long,” he thought, as he went slowly to his dressing-room, where he dropped into a chair, breathless and broken.

Renshaw brought him a tumbler of weak brandy and water.

“Well, sir, you were never finer, but I’m afraid you took a bit too much out of yourself in your last act.”

“Think of him, Renshaw, at his last fence—the hunted boar—deserted by the creatures he had made. Think of him, that last Plantagenet, who had staked men’s heads upon his game, as if they were counters—whose end was like the fall of a star.”

“Yes, he was a prodigious villain; but I’d rather think about you—just now. You’ve overdone it to-night, sir. Your eyes

are bloodshot, and you're all of a shiver. I should like you to see a doctor."

"No—no—I shall be all right in a few minutes. The fight took it out of me. There! I'm better now I've had a deep drink."

"Let me give you some neat brandy."

He poured out half a sherry glass of the cognac, which Godwin just put to his lips—and then, looking round the room with his curious smile, he said: "I am thinking of a hard winter nine years ago—when I was acting in this theatre, general utility—any part the stage-manager chose to give me—and he didn't favour me when he was casting the pieces—he and I didn't cotton to each other. He thought me proud—God help me! A proud utility actor! And I thought him what he really was—a drunken swine. This was the star's room. I never thought I should live to use it. Think of the gulf, Renshaw—the immeasurable distance between the youth I was then and the man I am now."

"You ought to be proud of such a career—and you ought to be happy," Renshaw said gently.

"Yes, I suppose I ought to be happy," Godwin said, laughing boisterously.

He broke from a wild laugh into convulsive sobbing, and hid his distorted face against the valet's coat sleeve.

Nobody could have behaved better than Renshaw. He asked no questions. His slow and gentle movements soothed his master, as he took off the stage clothes, and washed the painted face, and changed the dark-browed crook-back into the straight, spare figure of Mr. George Godwin—very pale, with colourless lips and bloodshot eyes, but master of himself once more. The actors he met as he left the theatre stopped to congratulate him on his "ovation." Heavens! how respectful they were, those fellow-mummers—one of whom—the first old man—the stock actor of a vanished past, who stuck like a limpet to the theatre where he was sure of his salary—had acted with him in that house nine years ago.

"Things have changed with you, Mr. Godwin," said the old man. "You've come into your own—and here you find me—'as you was before you was'—no change in me, sir, except a little more rheumatiz."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Dewdney. Come to breakfast with me at the 'London' to-morrow—no—the day after—ten o'clock sharp."

"That I will, Mr. Godwin, and I'm proud to be invited. Good



night! Good night!" And old Dewdney trotted gaily down the street, carrying his sword under his seedy overcoat.

Renshaw, who was carrying the royal sword in a handsome pig-skin sword-case, smiled as he heard the conversation. He knew that the old actor would find a bank-note under his plate at that breakfast.

Godwin and his valet generally supped at the same table when they were travelling, on those rare occasions when the master was not being entertained by some local magnate, and made the star of a brilliant gathering.

Those *tête-à-tête* suppers of master and servant were generally cheerful and loquacious, for the men were in perfect sympathy; but to-night Godwin was in no mood for food or talk. He dismissed the waiter as soon as the dishes were on the table and the bottle of Mouton decanted—and then sat silent, letting his valet wait upon him, a task Renshaw loved; but he could do very little to-night, and had to see the soup pushed aside, and the cutlets given to Hector, who knew that there was something wrong before he jumped upon his master's knees, and pushed his rough head into his master's waistcoat.

Godwin spent half the night writing a letter. Renshaw left him sitting at a table by the fire in his bedroom, with his writing-case open before him, and a pair of wax candles—he had insisted upon fresh candles, and a second pair in reserve.

"Make up the fire, like a good fellow, and leave me a full scuttle—and good night to you."

"I should like to have seen you snug in bed, sir," Renshaw said sadly. "I wish you were a better sleeper."

"That's to wish me another man. I have always heard the birds that sing before dawn, and when I was a boy there was not a long interval between the screech-owls and the missel-thrushes."

"It would lengthen your life if you could sleep longer."

"I don't want long life."

"You'll think differently when you are older."

"Who knows? Good night."

"Good night, sir. My room is on the other side of the passage, close by—number fifteen," and Renshaw reluctantly retired.

Without having ever been taught valeting, the *ci-devant* utility man was an inestimable servant—who never forgot the smallest detail that made for his master's comfort. He felt no humiliation in calling Godwin master, and was indeed proud to serve such

a man. His only shame was to have been himself a failure in the profession he had adopted out of sheer love.

The son of a highly respectable solicitor, in the City of London, he had been educated at Merchant Taylors', and had been unlucky enough to distinguish himself in a Shakespearian recitation—Henry the Fifth's speech on the eve of Agincourt, which dazzling success had filled him with a belief that he was "a born actor"—it being unfortunately a common delusion of the uncritical public that any lad or lass who can deliver a Shakespearian tirade with voice and emphasis is an embryo Kean or Siddons. Being assured of this natal capacity by friends from Hornsey and friends from Camberwell, those remote suburbs being here of one mind, young Renshaw had spent all his pocket money upon the pit of the Patent Theatres, and had run away from home and his father's office a week after his seventeenth birthday, to suffer the customary hardships of the young actor who has just enough good looks and power of speech to keep him above starvation-point in his weary pilgrimage from one provincial theatre to another. He had been on the stage for fifteen years, and had never played leading business, when, depressed and out at elbows, he met George Godwin, and from that hour he had been happy—with only an occasional pang as he remembered his long, dull experience in that dazzling world of his boyish dream. Yes, he, the utility man, had had his dream, just as Godwin had—only it had never been realized.

How long it took Godwin to write that letter! But there was solace—there was respite even in writing to her—although, as his pen rushed along the page in that passionate outpouring of his grief, there came the chilling fear that she might return his letter unopened, or fling it into the fire unread. He had offended her beyond the possibility of pardon. That beloved face, transformed by anger, was before him as he wrote—pale as marble, for the indignant flush had faded when she stood erect and motionless, with lifted hand pointing to the door.

He implored her to forgive him—with abject self-contempt he asked her to pardon the sudden irresistible impulse that had made him offend; that moment of madness when he had held her reluctant form against his heart—that divine moment—moment of ecstasy, moment of shame. "You, who know not passion, may not know how to forgive the wretch who for one instant only lost all power of self-control. Never till then had I forgotten what was due to you. For two years I had been

happy in the priceless favour you gave me—when you made me your friend. For two years I never looked beyond that sweet and serious intimacy ; to sit near you, to watch the changeful expression in the face that was to me the loveliest upon earth—to hear the low expressive voice—to talk with you of higher things than I had ever spoken of with any other mortal. I have given you all that was best in my mind and heart, Isabel. Can you not pardon that one outburst of supreme passion, in which I let you see the coarser side of man's nature, his overpowering desire to possess the creature he adores ?

“ Think of the agony I had suffered in the long night before I came to you. I had seen my rival—I had heard the love in his low and measured speech—I who suffered the fever, knew the symptoms. I saw a man strong in resolve, attractive in person—a man who meant to win you, and who had the world on his side. What had I to oppose against such a rival ? Only my love—only the passion which consumed me, and which I fondly believed was not unreciprocated. I thought you loved me—I still think that I have your love : and that the bond which fastens me to a wife from whom I am parted for ever should not prevail against the affection of hearts like ours.

“ Far away from you—in this dreary room—where the last ashes of a dying fire drop on the hearth as I write, and the grey glimmer of dawn falls across the page—unmoved by passion—I still plead as I pleaded in those wild moments that offended you. I plead in calm deliberate thought.”

And then followed the old, old appeal that has come from the passionate heart of the despairing lover in all the ages—since David sickened for Bathsheba—since Antony lost a world for Cleopatra—since Paolo forgot the obligation of honour and of blood in the kiss that was fate ; the old, old story, the old despairing cry, and the old question, “ What is this paltry world with its sickening conventions worth that you and I should spend our lives in one long regret, just to stand well with people whom for the most part we despise ? ”

He appealed to her generosity—he called upon her courage. He wrote of those other women who had burst the bonds of convention and had been happy—women whom the world had honoured for having broken its iron rule. He argued, just as a hundred other men had argued, that if she feared to face the world as his wife without the legal tie, they could leave that world for ever—and, forgotten and unknown, could find

some lovely land where no shadow could ever fall across their path. The success for which he had toiled almost from childhood, through difficulties and privations that few men had known, was nothing to him—the art he had loved was nothing. He would never enter a theatre again if it were her will that he should cease to be an actor. He lived only to love and to obey her—and he did not believe that he could live without her. He could not live without her. Yet in all those pages of impassioned pleading there was no hint of the weakling's cowardly threat—"I will kill myself if you do not grant my prayer."

He went out in the bleak morning to post his letter—and from the post office he walked to the manager's house, which was next door to the theatre. He wanted to make a change in the three-nights' programme.

He was to have played Benedick, Romeo, Don Felix. He felt that to act a comedy part was impossible in his state of mind. The most arduous, the most tragic characters in his repertoire would alone serve for the three hours' forgetfulness that he needed.

He would play Lear, Shylock, Sir Giles Overreach, if those pieces could be cast at short notice.

The manager was delighted. Exeter wanted to see Mr. Godwin in his most powerful characters. As for the stock company, they were all experienced actors, and would prove equal to the occasion.

"It will put them to the pin of their collar, sir—and they won't be letter-perfect at rehearsal, but they'll be all right at night."

"But those plays have been done in the theatre lately, I suppose?" said Godwin, who shivered at the phrase "all right at night."

He had heard it before, with disastrous results.

"Oh yes—they are stock pieces. You may trust me, Mr. Godwin. We shall do you credit. But I'm sorry to see you looking so ill. I'm afraid you felt the strain last night—after your journey on Monday."

"Yes, I felt the strain."

The Exe was a melancholy river when Godwin paced its shore—a dull and sluggish stream that might have been Styx. His own deep gloom of mind darkened the river, and the pastures silvered with snow, and the leafless hedges, the black branches

of elm and ash behind which a blue sky was smiling. He could not feel the winter sunshine or see the cheerful light. He would hardly have been surprised if the fisherman's boat creeping along by the rushes had been Charon's. He was ready. What was there left for him but death, if his offence was beyond the hope of pardon?

He went back to his hotel, dined like an anchorite, and spent three hours in arduous labour on his conception of Lear. Every scene was gone over, every great speech was repeated, every gesture studied, in front of the smoke-dimmed looking-glass.

Nothing in his life, no personal grief, no pain of mind and body, could make him neglectful of his art.

But when his task was done, he sat down after midnight, and wrote another letter to Isabel Beaumont—a second letter apologising for some things he had written in his first—but again expatiating upon that possible future that might make them more than friends, more than lovers, man and wife in all but that legal ceremony which should count for nothing with great spirits.

He wrote of Shelley and his Mary. Were ever two souls more sinless—two minds more exquisite? He wrote of other illicit loves—which to him seemed blameless. He forgot the kind of woman to whom he was writing—and it was only after his letter was in the post that he awoke to the enormity, from Isabel Beaumont's point of view, of the things that he had written.

He wrote to her every day. Each day recalling something that he had written yesterday.

He had all the success that an ambitious artist could desire. The theatre was full every night that he acted—and the call before the curtain, much rarer in those days than in the modern theatre, was repeated after every performance. The financial result of the engagement was even more flattering than these signs of favour; yet Godwin went back to London with sunken cheeks and haggard eyes—a face that frightened Sarah Merritt, and made her cheerful welcome as fine a piece of acting as anything to be seen in the theatre. Not for worlds would she have him know how his aspect shocked her.

"My dearest, you look a bit tired," was the most she said, as they sat at their late supper, after Godwin's return.

"It has been an exacting week."

"What? Benedick, Don Felix? Do you call those exacting parts?"



"I changed the bill—I gave them Shylock, Sir Giles, and Lear."

"You foolish fellow—why will you always do the hardest work you can?"

"I like work," he said. "They had seen Kemble in 'Much Ado' this season. They might have liked me less as Benedick. My Lear pleased them."

Sarah saw that he had no appetite for the chicken which she herself had roasted for him—the winter salad she had made. He ate like a man who eats only because he is obliged. He looked a wreck—horribly changed.

He was at Lady Beaumont's door next day before eleven—betwixt hope and fear. Surely his letters must have moved her to pity and forgive him. If they could never again be on the old happy terms—she would see him—were it only once—to tell him he was forgiven.

The shuttered windows in the ground-floor rooms, the blank aspect of the house, froze his heart. She was not there. He felt as if he would drop dead on the door-step before his loud knock and ring brought a tardy response, the dismal sound of bolts drawn, and a door unlocked.

An elderly woman opened the door. Lady Beaumont was abroad. She had left London more than a week ago. Where had she gone? She had gone to France—but she was on her way to Rome—where Mr. Crawford was living, and she would be away till after Easter, or perhaps longer.

"And her letters? Have they been sent to her?"

"Not yet, sir. They are to be sent at the end of the week to Florence, under cover to the English Ambassador, who was a friend of her ladyship's."

This was all. He had driven her from her home. In their latest discussion of her plans there had been no idea of a continental journey. She meant to stay in London till the summer—when she was to go to her house in Scotland, the old Scottish home that she loved—and where they might meet, if he should happen to be visiting her neighbour the Duchess of Pentland.

He had driven her out of England—she had put the barrier of distance between her and the man who had offended her—who had burst upon her with outrage and vehemence—the mad ardour of a man who thinks love invincible. She was gone. He had cast himself out of Paradise. What had she not given him? A happiness that might have lasted to the end of his life—for he told himself now that she had loved him too well

ever to have married another man. She had been contented and happy in that calm friendship. They had been like man and wife who had outlived passion, but who were still lovers in all that is essential and divine in human love.

This had been his—perhaps more than was ever granted to man, by such a woman. This had been his—and he had lost it for ever.

Well—he had still his art—he had something to live for; something dreamlike and intangible—yet as lofty as woman's love. He would give himself up to the most absorbing life that a man could live—the life of a famous actor, with the world at his feet.

He hardened his heart. He forced himself to think of his glittering dream in the wood, when his only desire was to be an actor—when the stage door was the opening into Paradise—when he would have sold himself to Satan for the promise of success. He went back to the theatre—the dark passages—the smell of lamp-oil and dust—the dismal room where Harvey sat at his table with a pile of play-books in front of him, casting pieces for the season that was to begin next week. The last nights of the Pantomime had been advertised—those tawdry scenes and properties that had once been glorious with gold and silver and stage jewels were soon to be swept into the limbo of forgotten things. Harvey was full of work for the new season—new plays—new dresses—new actors, and Godwin. He would still be paramount. No actor had arisen to push him from his place. Harvey welcomed his leading man with effusion.

“I'm deuced glad to see you, my dear fellow. I was afraid you'd run things close as usual. I thought you were going to Bristol for three nights, after Exeter.”

“I gave up Bristol. I was tired.”

“Tired! You look half dead. Sit down and let us settle our programme for the first fortnight. Have you fixed upon the play for your opening night?”

“Yes. ‘Lear.’”

“‘Lear’ will do. Gloomy—but the public likes you in it!”

“They liked me at Exeter. It hit them more than anything I did.”

“And you gave them Shylock and Sir Giles. You are fonder of tragedy than I should be, if I were as good as you are in comedy.”

They talked for a long time, and Godwin had never been more alert and eager in planning future productions.

"Arden of Feversham"—a ghastly play—but it would be new and startling. Manfred—yes—he would act Manfred. "Bertram"—"Venice Preserved."

"It isn't a lively list," sighed Harvey, "but they'll come to see you in anything. The play is not the thing in your case. It's the actor they want. If you were to recite the alphabet by way of an interlude, they'd want it over again."

It was late in the afternoon when Godwin came out of darkness and dust into the clear winter light—late—but not too late to call upon his duchess—the one friend to whom his aching heart turned in this day of despair. He went to her for comfort because she only knew his pain.

She was at home, and alone in her spacious morning-room on the second floor—adjoining that more luxurious sitting-room where the Duke spent the greater part of his London life—and where he sometimes received visitors of distinction.

She welcomed Godwin even more kindly than usual, and she told him what everybody had been telling him lately, that he was looking desperately ill.

"You, who defied Fate, should be braver," she said.

"I am going to be brave, Duchess. I have been preaching a sermon to myself since eleven o'clock this morning. I have been telling myself that love is a small thing in a man's life—if he has ambition and a career. So long as I can act I have my dream. I am going to live for my dream—yes, till the green curtain falls."

"It is a beautiful dream, Godwin—I know none lovelier. To give new life to the master poet. If it were not for actors like you Shakespeare would be no longer a living presence among us. He would be dead and forgotten—or at best sumptuously bound and lying in state in superior people's libraries."

"Yes," he sighed, "Shakespeare is some excuse for the actor's existence—otherwise the world could do without him."

There was a silence—and then he asked abruptly:—

"Why did Lady Beaumont leave England?"

"Because she wanted to spend the rest of the winter in Rome—I know no better reason."

His face flushed. "Then she does not mean to marry Marlow?"

"Who knows? If he is half as determined as I think him—the distance between London and Rome will not balk him."

"But as a politician—a man of consequence in the House—can he afford to be absent?"

"A man who is in love will hazard much—nothing else seems of consequence."

"Nothing else seems of consequence," Godwin echoed slowly. And then, again eager, "Her brother is in Rome. Has she gone to him?"

"I think it likely. They parted in anger—but she loves him too well to be unfriends long."

"Parted in anger? Why?"

"Didn't you know that it was on your account she quarrelled with him? Didn't you know the harm you have done in that woman's life? Malcolm objected to your visits—with good reason, as I think—and she was angry, and told him her house was her own, and she should receive whom she pleased—on which he said that the same house could not hold him and George Godwin. 'Then it must be for you to go,' she answered, and he went. She told me this next morning, while she was still angry."

Godwin was deeply moved. He went to the other end of the room to hide his tears. This was the woman he had offended—the woman who loved him and was not ashamed of her love—not ashamed to sacrifice the closest tie of kindred and of duty. And he who should have given her the homage men give to a saint had outraged her by his jealous fears, his frantic passion.

Conversation was impossible after this. As soon as he could command his feelings sufficiently, he took leave of his kind friend, who tried to detain him.

"I ought not to have spoken of their quarrel," she said, "but I supposed that Isabel had told you. Perhaps it is better you should know—for it will show you the danger of your romantic friendship, and how much it has cost your friend."

"It has cost me a broken heart," he muttered.

"Men's hearts do not break so easily. At least they 'brokenly live on.' You must be brave and generous, Godwin—generous for her—brave for yourself. You can understand now why I want Isabel to marry. That is the only way out of the difficulty. And for you there is nothing but to forget her."

"I will do that when my time comes—in the only possible Lethe," he answered, with a melancholy smile, as they shook hands.

"You are not acting till to-morrow night. Come and dine with the Duke and me. He will love to hear you talk while

he sips his chicken broth, and we will give you Burgundy from a royal cellar. Come, Godwin—we will not ‘sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings’—although, God knows, our own dear old King’s fate will make a sad story when he is gone. But we won’t jar upon your despondency by being too lively. The Duke thinks we shall be invaded by Buonaparte in the spring—and that internally we are going to the dogs—everything wrong—and the only cure is a few more maniacs to shoot incapable ministers.”

Godwin thanked her—but excused himself on the plea of business. Later he would most gladly spend an evening in that congenial company, and his kind friends should not be bored by a lugubrious guest.

“I am like Iago in one detail. I do not wear my heart upon my sleeve.”

A great actor’s fame is cumulative. Every successful season widens the circle of his renown. New people see him—some who come from afar—and admire him, and go about talking of him. That season which opened with a house crowded from floor to ceiling—with the Prince Regent, and royal dukes and duchesses—and royal favourites—in the boxes; and a pit surging with an excited crowd—enthusiasm everywhere—that season which began with the finest performance of *Lear* that George Godwin had ever given—was the actor’s apogee. His star could rise no higher. Never had he acted so well—or been so brilliantly successful. It seemed as if London held only one actor. There were other theatres, and people went to see other plays. Tom and Jerry could still amuse at one house—and English opera had a certain vogue at another—and at minor theatres imitators of Godwin were tearing a passion to tatters in melodrama—not being allowed to tear Shakespeare in those days of patents and privileges. Other theatres existed—and sometimes flourished—but no one talked about them in polite society, where everybody talked of Godwin. He was more run after than he had ever been—and was to be seen on all great occasions. Last year he had refused almost all invitations—but now he had a zest for society, and flashed and sparkled at great men’s tables. The pale poetical face was remarkable even where all the guests were distinguished. Rogers said of him that he always looked a gentleman, but never looked like other people. “He is *sui generis* in his face and figure as he is in his acting,” said the poet.

Sarah Merritt sighed over those nights that were given to



society—nights when her son should have been resting from his arduous work at the theatre.

"Society is rest," he told her. "It calls for no effort—I have only to move about among the crowd—and say a few words here and there—or to sit at dinner and listen to other men's talk. They may be as brilliant as they like—but I don't try to outshine them. Society amuses me—and a man has to be amused."

"If it makes you happy, dear. That is all I want."

Sarah Merritt said no more—but the son of her adoption could not hoodwink her. She knew that there was an unsatisfied heart under that calm aspect. She knew that his profession no longer absorbed all his thoughts—that something was wanting in the life that ought to be so full. He was always kind, always affectionate, but he no longer told her his thoughts and feelings as in the days before his marriage—and even after—for Fanny had never come between mother and son. Sarah had always been the confidante—the keenly interested listener to every detail of the actor's life.

"You don't tell me about the theatre as you used," she said one night, after he had answered her eager questions by monosyllables.

"My dear mother, I used to talk too much about the theatre—nobody but you could have borne with such an egotist. But now to prate about the characters I act would be only going over the same ground—and even you would be sick of it."

"Never, dear. I like to hear everything." And then with sudden tears she said, "Oh, my dearest, I hope you are not ungrateful to God for all the gifts you have received. I hope you are not tired of good fortune. You had to work hard and wait long—but you have been rewarded."

"No, I am not ungrateful—I have had my dream."

Summer was in the squares and streets, and London was a glorified city under a blue sky. It was half a year since Lady Beaumont had left London, but the shutters were still closed in the house in Spring Gardens when Godwin went from time to time to make inquiries, always politely received by the housemaid in charge, whose favour had been bought with gold. In April and May the answer had been the same. Her ladyship was still in Italy—her letters were to be sent to the British Embassy in Rome—but she was travelling about the country mostly, with Mr. Crawford. Then in June they were in the

Dolomite Mountains—and her letters were to be sent to a post office in that country.

He had written other letters since those wild outpourings of love and sorrow penned in his dreary nights at Exeter. He had urged every plea for pardon that despairing love could offer—had entreated to be again her friend—if he could never be her lover. But no reply had been vouchsafed—not one word of pity. She must have a heart of adamant, he thought—she who had been so tender a friend—so brave in breaking with her nearest and dearest for his sake. Could even offended virtue justify such implacable resentment?

Before the end of June Godwin had vanished from those entertainments at which he had shown himself with every appearance of enjoyment in social pleasures. He was living in the country, ten miles from the theatre, he told his friends, and was obliged to refuse all invitations. His doctor had sent him out of London, and had forbidden him the society which he had too much enjoyed. The actor who had been distinguished and observed in parties where he was perhaps the only untitled guest, was now, like Burke, conspicuous by his absence, and was only to be seen across the footlights.

There he was at his best. He knew himself that he had never acted better—never more completely identified himself with the character he represented. Perhaps it was because he had no longer any life outside the theatre. Nothing to hope for, nothing to think about—no sweet and serious face following him through all the hours with a kind smile—no gentle welcome waiting for him in the quiet of a room where he was always received with gladness, always expected. He had nothing left but to be Hamlet—to be Othello—to be Lear. His art had never possessed him with such power, as in this time of desolation. It was his only anodyne. He drove back to Wimbledon after midnight, utterly exhausted, his body a rag, his mind almost a blank—and after a night made up of hours of wakefulness, and half-hours of troubled sleep—he would spend the morning in a long ride—and come back to lie in his garden, with his dog and a book for only occupation and company.

It was a delight to Sarah Merritt to keep house for her son in the cottage he had bought for her—and on which he had spent double the price of the freehold in extensions and improvements. He had found an architect clever enough to add to house and stables without spoiling the quaint old fashion of the original building. He had now stables with ample space

for his hacks, and a pair of serviceable carriage horses to take him to the theatre and back three nights a week, and on occasion to a rehearsal on the off-days ; and he had built an additional sitting-room to hold books—a room for his solitary hours. His duchess came to dinner one summer evening, and was enchanted with Mount Pleasant, and praised Godwin for his good sense in having come to this retreat in the middle of the London season.

“ I was always hearing of you at fashionable parties,” she said, “ and I was sorry to think of you burning the candle of life at both ends. An actor’s career is arduous enough without any waste of power on futile pleasures.”

They strolled in the garden after dinner, a fertile old garden that was sweet in the summer dusk, full of hardy bush roses, pink and white, that had come to new life under Sarah Merritt’s fostering.

The evening wind was blowing over the wide expanse of heath, and the scent of the pine trees was in the air.

“ I suppose you hear now and then from your friend Lady Beaumont,” Godwin said, with a casual tone, after they had talked of many things.

“ Yes, she writes to me—short letters, at long intervals. She has been moving from place to place since May, when she and her brother left Rome.”

“ They are always together, then ? ”

“ Yes, he goes everywhere with her. They are making a tour of Italy, visiting all the famous churches—all the great monasteries—he is, at least—and she sees as much as a woman is allowed to see of such places. They were at Assisi when she wrote last—she had always a tender feeling for St. Francis. His self-abnegation, the life of daily sacrifice, the surrender of things that it is only human to care for—moved her deeply. I should not wonder if she were to end her life in a cloister.”

“ And what becomes of the marriage that you wished for, and which you thought inevitable ? ”

“ Vincent Marlow was in Rome at Easter. He meant to win her. But perhaps I was wrong. She is not like other women. She is self-contained and very proud. The determined courtship of an attractive man that would conquer almost any other woman may fail with her. She will seek happiness in her own way—and I should not be astonished if she found it under a black veil.”

“ Madness—suicide ! And you told me she was not a fanatic.”

"Nuns are not always fanatics. There are some among them full of sweetness and charity. Dear Godwin, do not let us talk of things that can only bring pain. Isabel has gone out of your life for ever. Believe me, it is better so. I think something must have happened to open her eyes to the danger of your romantic friendship—and that she left England as the easiest way of ending it—the kindest way. She is gone out of your life—but a life so rich as yours can do without love."

"True, Duchess. After all, what is love? An idea. I walk about the heath yonder—or I lie in this garden with an aching heart—lie in the sunshine and curse God's beautiful world—because she is gone—because nothing upon earth is alive or lovely without her. I lie in a dead world—and wish my life was done. To die—to sleep! It seems so easy. Don't be afraid, Duchess. I shan't resort to the bare bodkin. There are two women whose lives I am answerable for—my mother and my wife."

"That pretty child-wife of yours. Why don't you take her back to your heart, Godwin? It would make you happier."

"Impossible, Duchess."

"Why impossible? She did not elope. There was no lover in the case?"

"No, there was no lover. Our parting was friendly—but it is irrevocable. I want her to be happy; but the past is dead. It cannot come out of its grave."

They strolled about the grass, and looked at the roses, in a friendly silence, till her grace's carriage drove up to the gate, and they did not speak again till they clasped hands and said good night.

"Come soon to one of our quiet dinners in the Duke's room," she said.

Yes, he was always glad to be with them, he told her; and then he stood and watched her drive away in the summer twilight.

She was the only creature with whom he could speak of Isabel. Not even to his mother, the dear confidante of every phase in his career, of his failures and his triumphs, of heart-sickening self-contempt and arrogant self-assertion—not even to her had he ever breathed the name of the woman he loved. She had heard Fanny's sneers and jealous hints, and she might have suspected some romantic secret—but she had never questioned him. She knew that there was something amiss in his

life; but she respected the sorrow he would not share with her.

And this was his most brilliant season—this was the year when he found himself without a rival. Offers of a great career in America—offers from Scotland—and all the prosperous North of England—offers from Paris, where Talma was growing old, and a new sensation was wanted—offers that meant riches, were being pressed upon him—but they left him cold and indifferent.

His portrait had been painted in the earlier part of the season—by Lawrence for Lord Bayswater—and in June he had given a commission to Raeburn, who painted him lying in his garden with his dog, a picture not yet finished, and which was not to be exhibited till the following year—a portrait which was much more than a portrait, the poetical face, the careless gracefulness of the slender figure, the dog, and a background of Scotch firs against a sunset sky, making a picture that must be admired for all time.

“I am proud to have a place in your picture,” Godwin said, when the painter asked if he was satisfied. “And I shall go down to posterity as a young man with a dog.”

“Nonsense. My picture will be only known as your portrait.”

“I don’t think so. Who cares about the portrait in ‘The Lady’s Last Stake’? It is Hogarth we think of.”

This portrait was a present for Godwin’s duchess. It was the only offering he could give that admirable friend. She had asked him for his miniature—and he gave her this splendid painting—for which he sent the painter his cheque for three hundred guineas.

It was shortly after the picture was finished that he met Patrick O’Brien on Putney Heath in the course of his morning ride, swinging his stout oak stick as he trudged across the turf.

“Why, Pat, what a pleasant surprise! Have you walked all the way from the City so early?”

“The coach brought me from the Mansion House to Putney Bridge—so I’ve not walked very far—and a pleasant walk it is on a July morning. I’ve come to breakfast wid ye.”

“And it’s welcome you shall be, Pat. My mother will be delighted. She goes to Wimbledon Church every Sunday, and always comes back with the same story. There’s no parson living that can speak to the heart like Mr. O’Brien.”

“She favours me for the sake of old days, God bless her.”



Godwin got off his horse, and walked beside his friend, with the bridle over his arm.

They had the heath and the pond and the willows all to themselves in the early morning. There were feathered creatures about, and a horse or a donkey feeding here and there, but of humanity no sign. O'Brien looked about him, sniffing the air with rapture.

"To think that we're only half a dozen miles from Newgate, and St. Sepulchre's, and Pentonville Prison, and Smithfield Market—all the horrors of that great black city! And here we are in a place as beautiful as sweet Auburn before it was a deserted village, and the air so pure and strong that I feel as if it would make me drunk," he said; and then becoming suddenly serious: "I've brought you bad news, Godwin—bad news of your wife."

"What? Not disgrace?"

"No, no. Poor Fanny has been behaving very nicely—sitting in the garden reading a novel—and going to the play as often as she can get an order—and that's as often as she asks for it. They all recognise her claim—the pretty Miss Fountain, the rose of May, who left the lights when she was only just beginning to fade. She is too fond of the play, poor child."

"What's the matter, O'Brien—what does your preamble mean?"

"She caught cold in the spring—coming out of the hot theatre into a biting east wind—one of those winds that murder foolish young women in muslin frocks. It was a bad cold, and she neglected it—and it settled on her chest, and she has never been well since—her aunt tells me."

"Why didn't you let me know?"

"She wouldn't let me tell you. She made light of the mischief, swore it was nothing, and that she had had just such a cough very often in the spring, and it would go before midsummer. But summer came and the cough was still there. I kept my eye upon her—and used to take a dish of tea with her and Aunt Lavinia every other week—and she didn't seem getting any worse—only the cough didn't go—and just lately she has begun to have that lovely fatal look that means phthisis. I took her last week to Dr. Winstanley, of Savile Row, a better man than your Sir David—and he treated the case very seriously—said nothing to frighten the patient, but told Aunt Lavinia and me that the chest trouble was deep-seated, and that your wife mustn't spend a winter in England. She ought to be sent to

Madeira or the Canaries, before the cold weather begins—about the middle of September, for instance, and stay there till next April. The sea voyage out and home would be the making of her. He was hopeful as to the result—provided proper care is taken of her, and provided she herself will take care."

"Do you think that's likely?" Godwin asked sadly. "And what kind of a nurse will Miss Fountain make?"

"Better than you think, perhaps. The old woman is fond of her niece. I have seen enough of her to be sure of that. She has been her slave since they have been together—and has thought it enough happiness to be with her adorable girl, as she calls Fanny. She has a doglike affection, but not so wise as a dog's love would be—and she has indulged Fanny in every whim, however foolish—late nights at Vauxhall, listening to the foreign squallers in a climate that doesn't suit open-air concerts, and too much play-going. But as far as in her lay she has devoted herself to your wife."

"And Arden has never been to the house? Are you sure of that?"

"No, he has never been there. I can read poor Fanny's mind like a book—and no one from Carlton House has crossed her threshold. I have heard her say things that gave me a better idea of the case than any cross-examination of her neighbours—though that was satisfactory. She has been wounded to the quick by the neglect of her fine friends. Heaven knows what foolish ideas she had in her mind when she left you—Heaven knows what sentimental fancy—what hankering after the past, even the fancy that she liked the fat man at Carlton House better than Hamlet. Whatever was in her mind about some new reign of beauty and splendour—a Prince—a King for her slave—such foolish dreams could end only in disappointment. The Prince does not go back—or if he does the result is disastrous, as it was with Mrs. F. The Prince has his Madame de Maintenon—and has forgotten the charms he raved about a dozen years ago."

"Thank God! Well, Patrick, you must help me to do all that can be done. You must save her life. If we never see each other's face again her life is a sacred life for me. No one shall say I hazard it lightly. Let her go to Madeira, if that is best. Let her aunt go with her to keep her happy. But you must find her a better guardian than Miss Fountain—a maid accustomed to take charge of an invalid—a maid who understands the case. The doctor will find you one. It can

only be a question of a little trouble and plenty of money. I am rich, Pat, and I will spare nothing for the woman I swore to cherish."

"Faix, boy, it's just what I expected of you—and no more. I'm prouder of you this morning than I was the first night of the season, when you carried the house by storm as Lear. You rose to the height of Greek tragedy—fatal and terrible. I'd give a good deal to see you act *Cædipus*—the lion caught in the toils of a horrible destiny—death within his walls—stricken and sightless. You'd have made a grand thing of the old Greek play."

"Don't praise me, Pat. You make my heart ache. My God, if you knew what a worm I am!"

He couldn't keep the thought out of his mind—though he hated himself for it—hated and scorned himself.

"If she were to die, Isabel might be my wife."

If she were to die—the woman to whom he had never pledged his love? He had promised her affection—and he had kept that promise—and he would keep faith with her to the end—although she had won him with a lie—and although the galling sense of having been duped had gone with all his thoughts of her since their parting.

He sank into a deeper slough of despond after this. He dared not think of Isabel—to dwell upon her image, to recall memories that he adored, meant treason to his wife. How horrible, if she were dying, to calculate the hours, and prefigure the joys that might be his! He fought against temptation. He shut his eyes against a vision of happiness seen across a grave; but the vision was always there. He lay upon the ground in his lonely garden—and thought of the distance between the lawn and the roses and the woman who seemed so near. Sometimes the Tempter triumphed, and the woman was there, looking down at him with her divine smile—sometimes her arms were round his neck, she was lying against his heart, with lips that pardoned without words, kisses that forgave and blessed him.

He started up from one of these visions, and had his horse saddled in haste to ride to London. Sarah was in the garden cutting flowers, and ran to the gate as he was mounting.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I am going to London. I shall be back before five."

"Any sudden business at the theatre?"

He told her that he was going to see an old man—a friend. He was not acting that night, and the ride would do him good.

He was in rather low spirits. Sarah sighed, as she took her basket of flowers to the parlour.

Alas, he was always in low spirits! He had fallen into a settled melancholy, and even the stage had lost its charm for him.

"He has been too lucky," she thought; and she had a hard struggle not to brood over old Elspeth's dismal prophecy.

"The mischievous old creature loved to frighten people," she said, and pulled herself together, and went to see that the joint was basted diligently by the red-elbowed cook, and that the melted butter was not like bill-sticker's paste.

Work was the unfailing recipe for cheerfulness with Sarah Merritt. To be busy was to be gay. Why fret about her dearest? He was not ill. There was some unhappy love affair—but young men get over such things and laugh at past suffering.

She had been sorry to hear of Fanny's illness—and wanted to go and see her. But this Godwin forbade.

"There was much that was painful in our parting," he said, "and we both agreed that it was irrevocable. I shall do everything that can be done—through O'Brien—but I shall never see her again."

"Not even if she were dying, and wanted you?"

"She is not going to die. She is going to Madeira to be cured."

"I know, dear. I believe it's a certain cure—but though a good many people go there, they don't all come back. However, Fanny has a fine constitution, and she ought to pull through."

Godwin could not talk about his wife's illness. To wish for the death of a creature who has loved you! What could be a darker sin?

He was going on a strange errand. A long while ago, after a conversation in which Isabel had been earnest in the endeavour to make her friend understand the Roman Catholic faith as a religion of power and of love, she had asked him to hear Mass at the obscure church—or rather chapel—where she was a constant worshipper; and, as it was his delight to obey any wish of hers, he had found his way to the little sanctuary in a quiet street leading out of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and had listened devoutly to a service that appealed to his imagination and touched his heart, without bringing him any nearer to the fold which his friend would have had him enter. The gospel story which he had loved as a boy had taken a deep hold upon his mind, but

it had never been a religion. He had lived his life without God—and yet he thought he had been a Christian. Christianity was for him a way of life ; and the only creed he knew was comprised in the Sermon on the Mount.

Whatever his motive in entering the chapel, Godwin gave himself up to the genius of the place. The divine voices, the music of one of Mozart's Masses, moved him with a vague sense of something solemn and divine. Isabel was kneeling a little way off, just near enough for him to see the bent head, the clasped hands, the stillness of a mind absorbed in thought. For her this ceremonial, which was for him no more than a stage-play, meant the deep things of life. He had not told her that he was coming on this particular morning. He had said only that he would attend High Mass some Sunday, at the hour she told him.

He had been impressed by the sermon—which was not doctrinal, and appealed more to the heart than to the head ; the discourse of a grey-haired old priest, an Irishman, who had preached in that church for thirty years, and was beloved by the congregation, which, although small, included all sorts and conditions of men—for the papists of those days had not many places of worship in London.

The old man had preached what the followers of Wesley and Whitefield would have called an awakening sermon. He had addressed himself to the hearts of his flock, and he had spoken as one who had the profound knowledge of human nature which can pity and excuse human weakness. Godwin had gone often to the chapel under the stone colonnade ; for it was sweet to him to be sitting in the place where Isabel was a worshipper ; and though the rites of the altar had seemed to him no more than a faint echo of far-off things in Solomon's temple, he had been interested in the sermon whenever the grey-haired priest was in the pulpit.

And now, tormented by distressing thoughts, it had come upon him suddenly that he might find comfort by unburdening his heart to this good man. He was Isabel's confessor. She had spoken of him with affection, when she was talking of the solace of the confessional, trying to make her friend understand the consolations and the upholding power of her religion.

" We are like children groping in the dark ; and you refuse to follow the lamp that the Church holds out to light and lead us," she had said reproachfully.

No word spoken by those lips had been forgotten, and now,



estranged from her and unforgiven, he yearned for any association that could bring him nearer to her.

He found Father Maurice in a house near the chapel, and he was received with kindness when he introduced himself.

"Yes, I am familiar with your name and your talent, Mr. Godwin. I have never seen you act—since the theatre is forbidden to us—but your fame has reached even my solitary study, where a newspaper sometimes comes between me and my books. Yes, I have heard of you. I am glad to see you."

"You see an unhappy man, Father. I left my home an hour ago hopeless, and almost despairing; and in my utter dejection your image came into my mind, the memory of words that I heard from your pulpit more than a year ago; and I thought—There is a man who could understand and help me."

"Are you a Roman Catholic?"

"No."

"But you have been in my chapel. Yes, I remember. The sacristan noticed your presence. He told me that he had seen you often on Sundays, at High Mass. Why did you come, if you are a Protestant?"

"I am a man of no religion. From my childhood I have loved Jesus of Nazareth—I have felt the beauty of His life and of His philosophy—but I am not orthodox. There are things even in the Protestant religion that I cannot believe. The Catholic dogma is far too deep for my fathom-line."

"Because you are too clever. You criticise and question, when you have only to believe and pray. Prayer will remove your mountain of doubt. Obedience will lead to faith—and with faith all is won. Why did you come to my chapel?"

"Because it is very dear to me. One whom I love is a worshipper in that place. To breathe the air she breathed was sweet; and if I could have drawn nearer to her in faith I would have gladly surrendered any fixed ideas of my own—I would have been a child in obedience and humility."

"Then I do not despair of your conversion. But your thoughts must be pure of earthly influences—before you can come to the altar. You must be led there by the need of salvation; not by a woman's love. She would lead you there? Yes, I can understand. A good woman's first thought would be for the salvation of her friend—but the desire must come from yourself. You must approach that altar with a single heart, and with but one motive—to save your own soul. Come to me, as often as you please, and let me be your guide,"

"I have come to pour out my heart to you, if you will hear and pity."

"I cannot hear you in the confessional while you are outside the fold—but I will hear you as man to man, and all you say to me shall be as sacred as if it were spoken in the confessional."

"You understand the heart of man. You know that there are sins of thought as well as sins of deed—wicked thoughts—cruel imaginings—bloodless murder."

"Yes, I know," the priest said, with a grave look.

And then Godwin told the story of his life since his break with a woman he worshipped—and who had trusted him and given him her friendship, too pure to fear evil. He told of the black despair—the desperate endeavour to live without love—to exist only for stage triumphs—to be a monster of selfishness and vanity. He told the priest of his agony of remorse for having offended that noble friend, and how, lonely and unforgiven, the months had seemed to him years since he had lost her. And then he told how the wife who was the only barrier between them was threatened with a fatal disease—and how, amidst all his desire to do his duty, and to be kind, and to prolong the threatened life, there had come the lurid light of a wicked hope—"If she were to die and set me free!"

The priest was infinitely kind. He did not turn his face from the repentant sinner because the lost sheep was outside the fold. He said that it was in such a crisis of a man's life the Church could help him. He urged Godwin to give up his mind to the contemplation of the only faith in which he could find peace and security.

"Your remorse for those unhappy thoughts is full of promise. To have had such flashes of wicked hope was only to be human. It is much that you know you have sinned. God pardons those who do not pardon themselves. You must leave off brooding upon an unhappy love—tell yourself how dreadful a thing it is to fix your hope of bliss upon a creature as mortal as yourself, a life that may cease at a moment—and while you are surrendering your soul, with all chances of salvation, for a dream of earthly bliss, she whom you love may be clay, and you may be wasting your passion upon a grave. What can I do for you, my poor young friend, if you will not let me teach you the only way—the one sure path to peace in this world, and blessedness in the world to come?"

"You mean the way of renunciation. To forget that I am a man, and try to believe I am a saint."

"You are out in the darkness—a wanderer without a star—come back to me—to-morrow, if you can. Come to me with a humble heart, and I will teach you to believe and to hope."

"Can belief be taught?"

"Perhaps not; but knowledge is the beginning of faith."

Godwin rode back to Wimbledon with an easier mind. Could it be that there were comfort and help for the distracted spirit in that Church from which he had held himself obstinately aloof when Isabel had pleaded with him? She had told him once that nothing could make her happier than to know that he had found the only way to everlasting life. While she was talking to him he had remembered two lines in a poem that everybody had been reading just then:—

"Thou for my sake at Allah's shrine,  
And I at any god's for thine."

He had been at least so far true to himself that he had never pretended to believe.

The old priest's thoughtful face had interested him even more than his words. There had been something in the keen look of the dark eyes under shaggy white brows, something of sympathy and understanding that had given him the idea of being already known to the man to whom he had taken his troubles. The instant understanding—the few questions—the friendly tone—had suggested something more than the father confessor, and he had thought, "This man knows the secret of my life."

He knew the iron rule of the confessional—and that not by one hint of previous knowledge could the priest risk the betrayal of a penitent. Yet in the allusion to a good woman's desire for her friend's salvation he had thought, "She has told him of her endeavour to bring me into her Church. She has told him of her anxiety for the lost soul of her friend."

If he could be better worthy of her? If he could be nearer to her by believing as she believed? The thought drew him towards the kind priest who had offered to help him. But for the man who had lived till thirty years of age with only a vague belief in Christianity as a way of life, the distance to be traversed to the fullness of belief in the Church of Rome must be a long and difficult journey.

Everything had been arranged for Fanny's voyage in search of health. O'Brien had been indefatigable and efficient. Her

cabin had been taken on a fine East Indiaman—one of Green's ships. A maid had been found, a middle-aged widow with a pleasant manner, an intelligent countenance, and undoubted respectability—a woman who had nursed a consumptive mistress, and had had her own sad experience, before she went into service, in the care of a consumptive husband. There were no hospital-trained and certificated nurses to be hired in those days; but this good woman had known a harder training.

"Fanny may consider herself lucky to have such a servant," Patrick told Godwin. "And you may make your mind easy about the voyage, and about your wife's quarters on the island. I have made all necessary inquiries, and have had full information. The lodgings are taken for the winter, comfortable rooms, with a lovely view, in one of the best houses on the island—vouched for by the captain of the 'Robert Clive.'"

"And is Miss Fountain alive to the gravity of the case, and to her responsibility?"

"Miss Fountain is not so bad as you think. She would go through fire and water for her niece; indeed, she is the kind of woman who always offers to go through fire and water, without considering that it is the last thing required of her. Miss Fountain will be more ornamental than useful—but Fanny wants her, and she will help to keep Fanny happy—and that is an important factor in the cure."

Cure? Was there any cure for consumption? O'Brien spoke as if it were a certainty. A mild climate—good nursing, and common prudence. He seemed to think nothing more was necessary.

Godwin poured out his money like water. Let no expense be spared—let everything be done that can make the voyage pleasant, and residence on the island comfortable.

"Fanny has been very good," O'Brien told him. "She has kept out of debt—and she has saved enough to pay for her outfit. She was very full of her outfit, poor child—the pretty summery frocks for warm days, and the new fur tippet that she bought for wearing on deck. Of course there is a good deal of spending for two women in eight hundred a year; but it is something to your wife's credit that she has lived quietly, and has kept out of debt."

And then came Fanny's humble request that she might see her husband before the ship sailed.

"She says she may never come back; and that's an un-

answerable argument—I don't think you can say no to that," O'Brien said gently.

"Of course I will see her, if it will make her any happier," Godwin said.

He would not make a favour of so slight a thing. There would be pain in such a meeting—and a dull aching memory when the meeting was over—but he wanted to be kind to her. He had always wanted to be kind. Even that night when she had come to his dressing-room, flaming with her wrongs from Harvey—and when she had stamped her foot upon the ground and told him that he did not care. He had always wanted to be kind. Her weakness had appealed to him as nothing else could have done. Even her confession, though it had shocked and humiliated him, had not alienated his pity. So young and lovely, so tender and so weak, the victim of such a tawdry seducer.

The "Clive" was lying off Gravesend in the pale gold of an autumn sunset when Godwin went on board her. She was to sail early on the following morning. Fanny and her aunt had been on the ship for a day and a half, and it had seemed a long time.

"I thought you would never come," she told her husband, when he stepped from the accommodation ladder on to the deck.

She had been standing on the poop deck, waiting for him. She had seen the boat leave the shore, and had watched every dip of the waterman's oars.

"I thought you did not mean to come."

"Have I ever broken my word to you?"

"Never—but I had no word of yours, not one line to say you would come—only a message through Mr. O'Brien. That was rather unkind."

"I did not mean to be unkind. I thought a word was enough. I could not come sooner. I was acting last night."

"With Jessie Vernon—*alias* Thompson. How trumpery those stage names are! I kept my own name."

She was still the same Fanny. And she was as pretty as ever—prettier, alas!—for there was a brilliancy of colouring beyond her beauty of the past—though her complexion had always been her strong point—the exquisite fairness that had made other women seem dark.

To-night he saw the hectic carnation upon pinched cheeks, the hectic brilliancy in eyes that had grown larger.



They looked at each other seriously in the melancholy light.

"I dare say you think me dreadfully altered," she said. "A perfect wreck."

"No, my dear. You are just your old self—the pretty Miss Fountain who smiled at my cheap overcoat."

"You ought not to remind me of that. When I saw your boots how could I believe you were the genius we were waiting for?"

"Those boots had been good friends. I had walked more than two hundred miles in them. Well, Fanny, all you have to do is to take care of yourself, and come back to England in the spring, well and strong."

She looked at him with a passionate yearning in the too brilliant eyes.

"Do you think I shall come back—ever?"

"Of course you are coming back. That is what you are going for—to get well, far away from a London winter—from wet and fog—and sunless skies."

"Do you want me to come back?"

Her look thrilled him. She seemed as if she were reading his inmost thoughts—plucking out the heart of his mystery. How could he answer her?

"I will pray for your restoration to health every day of my life while you are away," he said.

He thought of the good priest. Yes, he could at least pray—he had faith enough for that—for the stretching out of appealing hands, the lifting up of a sorrowful voice, even if he knew not whither the cry and the beseeching hands were addressed.

They stood side by side, without words, looking at the long grey marshes, across the water where the last ray of sun had faded. Day was slowly dying.

It was Fanny who broke the silence.

"You look ill," she said. "I think you are more changed than I am. Indeed, I have not had much the matter with me—only a tiresome cough—and bad nights—and a pain in my chest sometimes. Aunt Lavinia has made a foolish fuss—I could have wintered in Cornwall—and cost much less money. I have been a dreadful expense to you, George. How sorry you must be that you ever married me. But if you had loved me it would have all been different. You don't know what a good wife I should have made."

"Did I ever complain of you?"

"No, you were too forbearing—too kind! I think I should have done better with a harder master."

"When I wanted to take you to Ireland, and tried to be master, you ran away."

Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"I was a fool," she said. "A vain fool. You should have let me go back to the stage—that was your mistake. I couldn't be happy without the footlights. I wanted admiration—applause—to be somebody—not just Godwin's wife. I was tired of hearing you praised, when I ought to have worshipped you."

She took his hand and kissed it and wept over it.

"Oh, my dearest, if you only knew my heart. It has been yours, only yours, only yours, from the night we first acted together."

His face hardened.

"Fanny, do you forget our last meeting? Do you forget what you told me?"

"Oh, cruel, to remind me of that!"

"It is you who remind me when you talk of your love. I meant silence to be the sign of forgiveness. Let us forget as much as we can—that our marriage was a mistake on your part, and a misapprehension on mine."

She looked at him with something of her old spirit.

"I mean to come back," she said. "I know that I am not nearly so ill as that stupid old doctor thought. He doesn't understand how much stronger a woman's will may be than her constitution. I mean to come back."

After this they talked only of material things. It was too cold to stay longer on deck, and they went below, for Godwin to say good-bye to Miss Fountain, and to see his wife's maid, and her cabin, and all the things that had been done for her comfort. She was full of gratitude, thanking and blessing him; but when the inevitable moment of parting came, she broke down altogether, and the sensible maid carried her from the cuddy to her cabin, hysterical and half fainting, while Godwin went to the boat that was waiting for him, heavy-hearted, to post back to London.

Godwin was often with Father Maurice in the late autumn days when the Drury Lane season was drawing towards a close, and when the shutters had been shut at Mount Pleasant, and only a gardener left on the premises, as caretaker. He found comfort and even pleasure in the society of the old

priest, who was shrewd enough to mask his batteries, trusting to time for the actor's conversion from invincible ignorance to the creed which requires the largest capacity for belief.

Finding himself treated as a friend, Godwin talked as freely as he had talked to Patrick O'Brien, and in the course of animated discussions of the philosophies that men had invented for themselves in the infancy of the world, in talk of Plato, or in comparison between the asceticism of Sākyamuni and the asceticism of St. Francis of Assisi, Father Maurice contrived to expound the mysteries of the Roman Catholic Church.

It was pleasant to find that the man who was not permitted to enter a playhouse was yet an ardent Shakespearian, and keenly interested in the actor's career. The young man's early struggles and brilliant success appealed to the fervent Irish imagination, and Father Maurice loved to discuss Hamlet and Othello, Lear and Richard, and to hear the actor's conception of the characters in which he had made himself famous.

Godwin told O'Brien of this friendship, though he did not tell him how it had arisen; and he brought the two men together at his dinner-table, knowing that they were too broad-minded to feel unkindly towards each other.

"But I'd have ye beware of that smooth-tongued old gentleman," Patrick told Godwin in one of their winter walks. "He doesn't put his legs under your mahogany for nothing; and as sure as he pours your excellent Burgundy down his throat, he's pouring his pernicious theology into your innocent mind. He'll have you a papist before you know where you are."

"Would it much matter?"

"Would it matter—would the bottomless pit matter? Would the woman Jezebel that called herself a prophet matter? Oh, Godwin, I knew you were not much better than an infidel; but I never thought to see you an idolater. Your Father Maurice is a gentleman, and a cheery soul—but you'd better give him a wide berth if you don't want to be perverted."

"Perverted from what—from vague dreams and aching doubts? You mean converted. Any haven is good enough for a storm-beaten derelict."

"Oh, now you are in your melancholy mood. It's the old story, George—too much success. A taste of failure would put you in good spirits. Fortune tumbles into your lap without your asking for it. Thirty thousand pounds from a total stranger—fancy prices for every box in the theatre when you take your benefit. If you feel the want of religious teaching, you'd better

come to your old tutor—and I'll try to save your soul alive. I tried hard to convert you when you were a gossoon—but you argued my head off with your notions—and wanted a God Almighty after your own way of thinking, which was more than I could promise you."

"I came to you for friendship and help, Pat—not for theology. Don't think the worse of me if I carry my sorrows to Father Maurice. There are reasons I can't tell you."

"Wheels within wheels. Don't I know that your lovely friend Lady Beaumont is a papist? It's she and not the priest that's after converting you."

Godwin was silent, and O'Brien did not press the question. Their friendship was like charity, not easily offended.

## CHAPTER XXIX

WINTER had come, and Godwin had made his last appearance at Drury Lane until the second month of another year.

The season had closed with a brilliant house ; and Stormont and Campion, hobnobbing over a Welsh rarebit and a pot of porter in their dressing-room, were constrained to acknowledge that Godwin's fame was still at the zenith, whereby the sheeplike nature of the British public was dwelt upon scornfully by both players.

"It's the fashion to run after him, just the fashion, and half the fools who pay their money at the box-office don't know why they come to see him."

"They come to see him because he isn't like anything human," said Stormont. "If it was not for his mannerisms he wouldn't have lasted six months."

He was still at the top of his vogue, and in spite of Mr. Stormont, he was the most natural actor who had ever trodden those boards ; but that something strange in voice and intonation was always there : a music that was not in other voices ; a charm that had been felt when he stood in the red light of the gipsy fire, reciting Hamlet's address to the Ghost—and making the gipsies think the Ghost was there.

He had engagements in Scotland and the North of England to fill the weeks in which "Harlequin Cassim Baba and the Forty Thieves" were occupying that stage which was his kingdom. He went from Edinburgh to spend a day with his dear duchess, his kindest friend among all those great people who had given him their friendship. Her Grace of Pentland was a sad duchess now, for the kind old Duke had dropped asleep in his arm-chair one October evening in his villa at Rothesay ; and after his wife had sat silent in the darkness for more than an hour, rather than disturb that tranquil slumber, the entrance of servants with lamps had revealed the sleep that knows no waking. She was the dowager duchess now, very white and thin in her deep mourning, and unspeakably saddened by the loss of her beloved companion.



Even in her sorrow she was able to welcome Godwin.

"I can talk to you about him better than to most people," she said, "for you could appreciate his fine mind and his lovable nature. It does me good to talk of him—but there are very few to whom I can talk without being wounded by the things they say. They tell me that he was old—that he was a sufferer—that he is happier in heaven than he was on earth. I try to realise the life after death—but I know that he was happy here, in this house where he was born, happy in our quiet days and constant companionship, and that he did not want to leave me. No! Death was not a release," she said with sudden energy. "I hate the people who say that."

And then she talked of Godwin and his season.

"I have read the papers—I know all about your new characters—Richard the Second, Wolsey, and that gloomy Bertram. I want to see you in Manfred, because you are like Manfred—but it will be a long time before I can go to the theatre—a year, at least, or perhaps longer. I live among my books, and with only this companion."

She bent down to caress the Duke's favourite collie, who was lying upon her long crape skirt.

"He never leaves me," she said. "He follows me from room to room, as if he were afraid that I should vanish out of his life, as his master did. It was a long time before he left off scratching at shut doors, or lying with his head on the ground outside the room where he last saw my husband, whining, oh, so piteously. And he would put his paw upon my arm, and look at me with eyes that questioned me as urgently as ever I was questioned by creatures that can speak."

She told Godwin that the Duke had left instructions that certain pieces of old silver, a Cromwellian tankard, and a Charles the Second salver, should be given to his friend George Godwin.

"He did not leave you a substantial legacy, as Lord Clontarf did—but you must not think he appreciated you less. He knew you were rich. The things he chose for you are not much to look at, but I know you will value them, and every year you live will make them more valuable—especially the ugly tankard."

Before they parted the Duchess spoke of Lady Beaumont, without waiting for Godwin to question her.

"This is her second winter in Rome, but she says no word of coming back to Scotland or to London. Her houses are shut, and her Scotch garden, of which she was once proud, has been neglected."

"And she has not married Vincent Marlow," said Godwin, with a grim smile.

"That is not his fault. If I was mistaken about her, I made no mistake about him. My friends in Italy tell me he has haunted her like her shadow whenever he could get away from London. The poor wretch has oscillated between ambition and love—not able to surrender his chances in either line. If a strong man's resolve can prevail she will end by marrying him. And in the meantime, my dear friend, you who are so rich in resources, so fortunate in gratified ambition, can afford to renounce a hopeless love."

Godwin was silent for some moments, and there was no further mention of Isabel; but on his journey back to Edinburgh he drove half a dozen miles out of his way in order to look at the closed house and the neglected garden that the Duchess had spoken of. The grey stone house and the blind windows, the battlemented wall, and the dry moat, the black branches of the cedar and the ghostly birches on the lawn, looked very melancholy in the winter dusk—a deserted house, a deserted garden. And it was his fault that she was an exile. It was his madness that had driven her from the home she loved. It was his own act that had cost him all that made the happiness of his life. The longer he brooded over that one fatal hour of his existence, the deeper became his remorse. The evil was irrevocable. He had slain the delight of his life; for, even if she had forgiven him, the fatal work of that hour could never have been undone. He had shown her the dark side of man's nature; he had shown her that the friendship she had believed in was an impossible thing. Never again could they have been together in the calm delight of perfect sympathy. If she could have forgotten he could not. Those moments of storm and fire would have mixed with all his thoughts. He had broken the spell.

It was more than a year since he had lost her—a year of strenuous toil; and the pain was no less than when she had been gone a week. His life away from the theatre was one long regret. It was only on the stage that he lived. The real life was now the dream—the fictitious life was the reality. His own identity was lost when he was Hamlet or Othello, Lear or Shylock, and for three hours he was alive.

But at the end of those three hours the reaction was terrible. As he lay back in his arm-chair in front of the dressing-table, while Renshaw bathed his forehead with vinegar and water,

he looked as if the life had gone out of him. Dr. Fenwick—the theatrical doctor, the man who loved dogs and actors—often came to the dressing-room at the end of the play, and, having taken his cue from Renshaw, always happened to have a neat little phial in his breast pocket.

“Just an innocent pick-me-up, my dear fellow. One that I’ve often given poor Cooke when he was at his worst. The big tragedies drain the life-blood out of a man. You really ought not to act four times a week. And you’ve been going on too long without a holiday.”

“I had my holiday in Scotland.”

“Acting five times a week, and being guest of honour at public dinners on the other two nights. Do you suppose I didn’t read the ‘Caledonian Mercury’ while you were in Edinburgh? You are burning the candle of life at both ends.”

“If I am, it will last longer than I want. The middle bit can be only old age and the world’s neglect, and the less I have of that the better.”

He stood up and drank the draught that Renshaw had prepared for him. He laughed as he put down the empty glass.

“‘Being gone, I am a man again.’ Don’t let us be dismal, my dear Fenwick, but come to supper. I’ll give you the best bottle of wine in my cellar, and my mother is sure to have something eatable for us.”

“Your mother is a diamond of the first water. Yes, I’ll come with pleasure, and give you another sermon after supper—on the same text—The candle of life, and how to husband it.”

The theatrical doctor was not the only person who was anxious about Godwin. Harvey was anxious. The Committee were anxious, the same Committee, with a few sad changes, that had smiled superciliously when Godwin thumped his fist upon the table, and cried, “Cæsar, or nothing.” They were his obedient servants now, and were ready to share Harvey’s uneasiness. They would give him more money. They would insist upon his taking a long holiday; but then, as Harvey reminded them, that would mean shutting the theatre in the best part of the year. Better let him go on. He was all courage and fire. Such men can stand work that would kill creatures of colder clay. Let him go on. There never had been such a season—better even than last year—though that was the best of a quarter of a century—in the new and the old theatre. Praise him, and reward him: but let him go on. All our interests are bound up in his success.

## CHAPTER XXX

FANNY had come back to London. It had been arranged for her to stay on the island till the end of April, but she was in London early in March. There had been an opportunity—a ship with plenty of room to spare had touched at Madeira, to take home a general officer and his family, and Fanny had insisted upon coming home. Her aunt had managed everything. Her aunt was very tired of the climate, which had not suited either her or her niece.

"It did wonders for the poor child in the first six weeks," she told O'Brien, who was very angry. "In fact, I believe her lungs are cured—but after Christmas she fell into a bad way—headaches—low spirits—nerves—no appetite, and hardly any sleep. The only thing to be done was to bring her home. She was better by the time we had been twenty-four hours at sea. You know, Mr. O'Brien, it was always understood that the sea voyage was to be half the cure. And I think you will admit that I have brought her back in good health, and looking ten years younger than when she left Gravesend."

"I'll say nothing about her looks, ma'am, for you must know that in her complaint the beauty of carnation cheeks and brilliant eyes is a fatal sign. But you've brought her back to cutting March winds, and if you don't take proper care she'll go out like the flame of a candle."

Godwin was troubled when he heard of his wife's return. It was like Fanny to have stultified all their care. He told O'Brien to neglect nothing that could be done for her welfare. The careful maid was to be kept as her nurse, and was to be paid generously—the famous doctor was to be consulted—or if London was too cold she must be taken to Ventnor, or Cornwall—to Falmouth, for instance, her native air. Would she not like to go to Falmouth, and spend the lovely spring weather in the place where she had been a happy child? He suggested everything that was kind—but when O'Brien told him she wanted to see him he refused peremptorily. Such a meeting could only do harm. She had been distressed and hysterical when they parted on board the "Clive."

O'Brien did not press the point.

"Well, I dare say you're right, George; but I can't help feeling touched when the poor thing talks of you—and of her gratitude for all you have done for her—never without tears. I believe she is just as much in love with you as the day I joined your hands."

And then he remembered the new picture he had seen the day before, over the mantelpiece in Fanny's drawing-room. The latest portrait of the magnificent George. Fanny's print was a proof before letters, and had cost her ten guineas, as she told O'Brien with a light laugh. She had bought it as a duty—because in these degenerate days it was good to show one's loyalty—and then she had talked of the Regent's manner—that incomparable manner which had made him the admiration of the civilised world. Since Charles the Second there had been no such Prince—

"The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
The observed of all observers"—

And then, as the words brought back a familiar scene, she had changed from her artificial lightness to hysterical tears.

"Oh, those lines! Shall I ever forget that night? The almost empty theatre—the bitter cold wind from the wings—and Godwin standing in the lights—that pale, expressive face, and the splendid eyes—that haunting face! I see it in my dreams. But, oh, dear Mr. O'Brien, he looked so ill that evening on the 'Clive.' He looked like a man with a mortal malady. Tell me the worst about him. Is he as ill as he looked that evening?"

"If he has a mortal malady, it is one for which medicine has no remedy—a too ardent spirit, a soul of fire. His lamp of life burns too fiercely. He won't live to be old."

"He might if he were happy," she said in a low voice, while her tears streamed too fast for the cambric handkerchief to stanch them.

O'Brien fancied he could read her thought. She was thinking that if she were dead he could marry the woman he loved.

"It was I who spoilt his life," she said.

One new play was to be produced before the end of the season. Godwin was to appear as Manfred, and the connoisseurs of the drama were all insistent upon his peculiar fitness for the



character. Just as the Duchess of Pentland had told him that he *was* Manfred, the critics and literary people, even unto the great Sir Walter, were going about Edinburgh and London urging the production of that magnificent poem—although all were willing to admit that it was not a play.

“It would be hopeless with any other actor, but it will be an enormous success with Godwin,” Harvey told the Committee.

For the actor who was to give form and substance to that splendid shadow the part of Manfred had an extraordinary fascination. In the long summer days when he and Sarah Merritt were living at Mount Pleasant, he was able to devote himself to the study of a part in which to fail would be disgrace. An actor at the pinnacle of his fame cannot afford to lose a step in the eminence he has mounted. He has to be measured against his past—and to come short of his finest achievement is to fail.

Godwin had to forget that his reputation was at stake, and to concentrate his thoughts upon the character he had to create—that strange, almost unearthly being, whose every utterance is a cry of pain, who lives under the burden of a sorrow that he must keep locked in the heart it is withering. If he did not kill the woman he loved, it was his fatal love for which she died. His existence is a perpetual regret—his days and hours are all of one colour—black as a starless night. His mind is steeped in a vain remorse. Yet through this inexorable gloom there must be flashes of light—the memory of hours that were sweet—the phantom joys of a never-to-be-forgotten past—and those wild endeavours to stretch out human hands to the world beyond human knowledge—to make the rulers of the spirit-world his servants. The mind that fears neither death nor hell—the will that can challenge the Unknown and the Infinite. This was the Manfred Godwin had to realise for a London audience. For the critic in the pit, for the fine ladies in the boxes, and for the grocer’s apprentice and his sweetheart in the gallery, he had to make Manfred live.

He gave himself up to the study of the poem, he forgot his own idiosyncrasies, and thought nothing of stage effects. The ordinary technique of his art could avail very little here. Everybody who knew the book had told him that Manfred was not dramatic. It remained to be seen if he could hold the audience for two hours with a monologue—the long-drawn-out study of a broken heart.

He was acting four nights a week—but he had two evenings

in which he could lie in his garden or roam about the heath—perfecting himself in the words of his part—long hours of meditation between dusk and midnight. He would not think of Manfred by day. It seemed to him that the poem only lived in the starry silence. Then the passionate soul of the man, the aspiring mind of the magician began to throb and burn—and in those hours Godwin's Manfred was created, and became as real as Hamlet and Othello.

All through that summer he had kept himself aloof from society. He had been seen neither at the Bayswater House dinners nor at Lady Guernsey's evenings. The fine flower of art and letters, science and statecraft, might be there, but Godwin the actor was missing.

He had little time for personal feeling in the latter part of the summer, for Manfred had been put into rehearsal, and there were no more leisure days for Godwin—no more hours of reading or reverie among the roses in the garden that he and Hector loved, no more long rambles on the hills towards Kingston and Epsom. He was at the theatre every day from eleven till four. Whether he acted at night or not, his day was spent in the drudgery of directing a rehearsal, and teaching the dull or the indifferent to realise characters for which they were unfitted at once by temperament and talents. All the strength of the company had been brought to bear upon this production. The singers and the dancers, the comedy people and the tragedy people, were all made available for dramatic and spectacular effect—and Godwin spared no effort to make the best of his material.

Mr. Stormont might be admirable as the buried Majesty of Denmark, and good as Kent in "King Lear"; but to inspire him with the awfulness of Arimanes, and to get just that feeling of the unearthly without which the scene of mystery and terror would be mere melodrama, was not an easy task. Again and again Godwin had to remind his actors that the play they were to produce was of a higher quality than "One o'Clock, or The Wood Demon," and required another kind of acting. The note of the supernatural must be sustained throughout. Susan Latimer as Nemesis must remember that she was not a repentant wife like Mrs. Haller—but the ruler of a world—unearthly and all-powerful—the Fate of men. Voice, movements, all must be in harmony with the idea of beings that were not of the earth earthy. He laboured with a sublime patience, and was always courteous and kind, with an indulgent smile for

incompetence—an awakening suggestion for dullness. He had been far from well before these rehearsals began. Mind and body had flagged—and he had been glad to lie on the grass and play with his dog, on days when even to read a favourite author seemed too great an exertion.

But from the moment he opened the prompt book at the first rehearsal he had lived only to make "Manfred" a success. Harvey sat at his little table in front of the orchestra, admiring the actor at his work, and did not even pretend to be stage-manager. He had been liberal as to outlay upon scenery and effects. Stage-lighting in those days was in its infancy, and gas was a new thing; but as much as could be done with the new light, was to be done for the star at the end of the Gothic gallery, and for the vision of Astarte in the Hall of Arimanes.

In the first act, where the spirits are only voices, Godwin had done wonders. Actors whose appearance would have destroyed the illusion could be taught to speak; and had at last attuned their speech to the supernatural, unconsciously imitating those tones of deepest music in which Godwin read the scene. He was letter-perfect at the first rehearsal—while the other players explained every misapprehension of the text by the excuse that they were "fishing for words."

The work was done—all that had to be done before the rising of the curtain. The actors were in high spirits, confident of success, and only anxious about minor details that affected their individual selves.

They all thought they had behaved with extraordinary generosity in allowing Godwin to coach them, and they were sorry he was looking haggard and ill, at that last rehearsal, when so much depended upon his performance in the evening. It might be a turning-point in his career. Failure in so original a character, and the rocket is burnt out and the stick comes down. No member of the company had ever been able to forget that simile of the falling firework.

Sarah Merritt welcomed her son at the five o'clock dinner—a meal for an anchorite, for how could a man dine generously who was to be on the stage in two hours?

They had left Wimbledon when the rehearsals began—so that Godwin might be near his work. The London house seemed sultry and airless after the garden where the breath of the pine woods mixed with the perfume of the roses. Sarah Merritt, studying her son's face as they sat opposite each other in the lessening light, tried to persuade herself that the want of that

health-giving air was cause enough for his ghastly aspect. And then again there was overwork. Those daily rehearsals—those stupid actors—would have worn out a stronger man. She was glad the night had come, although she dreaded the fever of that first performance.

“Manfred” was not a failure. The house was packed, the audience was brilliant. Byron’s name had attracted all the intellect and the fashion of London Society. Rogers was there, peering out of a stage box, and inwardly anticipating failure. “They might as well have tried to produce my ‘Pleasures of Memory’ as a drama,” he thought.

Campbell was there, and Moore; only the greatest of all, that splendid genius, the author of the tragedy, was far away—a melancholy wanderer, filling his broken life with dreams of Freedom for the oppressed of other lands—a patriot for Italy or for Greece, a satirist and an enemy for his own country.

People were talking of Lord Byron in the pauses of the play—pitying, blaming, regretting him; but they talked more of the actor than of the poet. They told each other that this Manfred, which critics had pronounced unactable, was Godwin’s grandest achievement. He made the shadow live. Remorse, despair, the passionate longing for the loved and lost, all the strings of the lyre were sounded by that master-hand. The pride of a fallen angel, the passion of a heart-broken lover: pride as indomitable as the spirit of Lucifer in the hour of defeat and ruin; sorrow as poignant as the grief of woman for the death of her child—all were expressed in the varying lights and shadows of that strange impersonation. It was there that the actor showed his highest art. The glamour of the supernatural never left him. He was always the magician, and the something unearthly in his face and voice sent a thrill of awe through the house, and kept the audience at fever-point.

Critics, who had prophesied failure, had to confess that “Manfred” was a fine thing, if you had the right man for the part.

“A magnificent monologue with scenic effects,” Hazlitt called it. “Godwin could make it attractive with only himself and a magic-lantern.” The other actors counted for nothing.

The excitement intensified as the play neared its dismal close. There was a silence in which every tone and every breath of the actor was audible in the remotest corner of the house.

The audience could hear the power of the voice gradually lessening—the voice of a dying man—they could see the cloud-

ing eyes—the languid movement of the hand of death stretched out towards the living hand.

Campion, who had given a respectable performance as the Abbot, could see more, and felt a thrill of fear as he grasped that lifeless hand. There was something more than acting in this sudden collapse. Was it the breakdown that Godwin's comrades had prophesied? Was it death?

"Cold—cold—even to the heart," said the Abbot in agitated accents; and then still more unsteadily, "But yet one prayer—alas—how fares it with thee?"

Manfred draws himself up suddenly to his full height, and with strange slowness—as if each word cost a separate effort—he speaks the last line.

"Old man, 'tis not so difficult to die."

The Abbot seems suddenly to forget age and dignity, and throws his arms about the dying Manfred with a vehemence not in character with his previous bearing—but Godwin slips from the supporting arm, staggers two or three paces towards the wing, and then falls face downwards on the stage. The audience have time to observe two or three convulsive movements in the prostrate figure, before the green curtain comes down.

"Always too realistic," Rogers mutters—and then to the two friends in his box: "Well, we have supped full of horrors; and now you must both come home with me, to a lobster and a spatchcock."

There was a tempest of applause while the audience waited for the actor to appear, and it seemed a long time to the impatience of Godwin's friends, before a hand drew back the edge of the curtain on the prompt side, and, to the general disappointment, stage-manager Harvey came to the footlights, a commonplace figure in evening dress. The pit and gallery were vehement in their disgust. Hisses, groans, and cat-calls saluted the official—and he made some futile attempts to be heard, before the audience were quiet enough to understand that Mr. Godwin had been seized with sudden illness, and was unable to appear in response to the flattering summons of his friends in front of the house. It was believed that his illness was not of a dangerous nature, and that only rest and quiet were needed for his recovery. He was receiving the utmost attention from two eminent doctors, and he would be taken to his own house under their care. In these circumstances the next performance of "Manfred" must be postponed for a short time, and due notice should be



given of Mr. Godwin's second appearance in the character. The favourite comedy of the "Honeymoon" would be played to-morrow evening, and the "Castle Spectre" would be performed on Thursday and Saturday, with the after-piece of "A Roland for an Oliver," the character of Maria Darlington by Miss Jessie Vernon.

"Acute congestion of the brain, my dear lady, and we may consider ourselves fortunate that it is not something worse—*foudroyant* apoplexy, for instance, as it might have been. When I saw him fall, I thought it was death. I was in a stage-box, near enough to see that he was not acting."

"Oh, Sir David, if I had known! I was in the upper boxes, so crowded, that I couldn't move hand or foot—and I was proud when I heard the applause, and knew that he had won another victory. My dear, dear son! He had set his heart upon making 'Manfred' a success, for he worships Lord Byron."

"Well, he has made a great play out of a fine poem. Don't cry, my dear soul. You have got him still, and we are going to cure him; but it will be a slow business."

"Will he ever act again?"

"Ever is a long word. We won't lose our finest actor if we can help it; but I think Mr. Fenwick here will agree with me that your son ought not to think of acting for at least a year."

Fenwick had been with the patient all night—sitting by the bed where Godwin lay unconscious, while Renshaw was driving all over London in a hackney coach, in search of two capable nurses. The doctors had given him instructions as to where such aids were to be looked for; but the finding experienced and respectable nurses was not an easy matter in the Regency.

"Not to act for a year! Oh, Sir David, he will be heart-broken when he knows that. The stage is all that he lives for. He has nothing else."

"He will have your affection, and the memory of his success," said Fenwick, who had a warm regard for Godwin's mother.

"It will be a long time before he will think about acting," said Sir David; "and when he does, we must be diplomatic. We needn't say anything about a year, or half a year, to him."

"No," said Fenwick. "We've got to patch him up, and give him another lease of life. We pulled him through when

he had a bullet between his ribs—but this will be a longer business—and not so easy.”

Sarah watched their faces with agonised eyes. On the whole they seemed hopeful—but they could not even tell her when consciousness might return. They would not say how long she must be resigned to see her idol lying there motionless, speechless, the image of death. His dog lay on the carpet by the bed—and seemed to understand. He had been allowed to stay there. If there should be a return of consciousness, Godwin might see the dog, perhaps even speak to him.

“Poor Hector,” said Fenwick, “he was with him after the duel—wouldn’t leave him for a moment—though he was a young dog then. He is older and quieter now.”

Days went by, and weeks. There were gleams of consciousness—brief intervals when he knew his mother, and held out a feeble hand to be clasped in hers. One morning he called Hector, and motioned with that frail hand for the dog to come upon his bed; but after every such awakening he would relapse into the dull lethargy that was so horribly like death. The hired nurses took turns in watching him day and night; but he was not given wholly to their care. Either Renshaw or Mrs. Merritt was always there. His slightest movement, his every breath, was watched with the eyes of love.

“I didn’t know how fond I was of him,” Renshaw told Sarah, one night, sitting by the bed. “God knows I had reason to be grateful to the friend who took me from destitution to comfort. I was proud of being his servant; and so I should have been if he had treated me like a servant, which he never did, God bless him.”

All London was interested in the actor’s recovery. Great people sent inquiries, hothouse flowers—choice fruit—and choicer wines—venison—game—all the things that were useless for that recumbent figure, whose only consciousness of the outside world was of one kind face, and the rough coat of a Scotch terrier.

The atmosphere of that silent house was heavy with the scent of exquisite flowers, but Godwin had not noticed the bowl of red roses on his table or the lilies on his chimneypiece. His intervals of consciousness had not been long enough to take in such details.

The silence of the house was awful for those who watched and waited. Straw lay deep along the east side of the square;

the knocker and the bell-pull had been removed, and a bulletin signed by the doctors was fixed to the door every morning, for the information of all inquirers, from Lord Grenville's secretary to the scene-shifter at Drury Lane.

To the outside world it seemed a long time since Godwin had vanished from the stage ; but to Sarah Merritt and Renshaw it was as if he had been lying ill for years. It seemed such a hopeless illness—so little change from day to day—so little to be done—nothing but to wait and watch, with patience and speechless prayer. Sarah had the support of unquestioning faith, and no disturbing thought came between her and the Mercy-seat. The God she believed in was infinite in beneficence as in power ; and in every moment of fear she told herself that He would not take her son from her. Her son ? She had nursed him and cherished him from the first hour of his existence ; she had guarded the flicker of life in his feeble infancy, watching every breath he drew, just as she was watching now. Was he not her son ? Was her right over him less than a mother's, who had done a mother's duty ?

Once in the midst of silent prayer the thought of old Elspeth flashed into her mind—the broken line of life. Yes—but the gipsy's dark whispers were of a violent death—"sudden and bloody." Those were the words hissed into her ear in the dark of the Forest.

The doctors were not absolutely despondent. They did not say much in answer to piteous questioning. He was not worse—no, he was not appreciably worse. He was to be kept quiet. Time must do the rest. Poor comfort, but Sarah had to be satisfied with it.

It was in the dead of the night, and the hired nurse was sleeping soundly in her easy chair, when Renshaw was awakened from a ten minutes' doze by the low murmur of the voice he loved.

"Now o'er the one half world  
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
The curtained sleeper ;—witchcraft celebrates  
Pale Hecate's offerings. . . .  
Oh, my soul's joy  
If after every tempest came such calms,  
May the winds blow till they have wakened death,  
And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas,  
Olympus high,

. . . . And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,  
Never to hope again. . . ."

The syllables came slowly and more slowly, till the voice died away. Strange how the half-awakened mind recalled familiar lines—unconscious of the break in their sequence. But it was much that he had spoken—much to tell Sarah Merritt when she came into the room at dawn, to open the window and let in the summer.

After this he would often lie for an hour at a stretch reciting—sometimes long speeches without a break—sometimes a jumble of famous soliloquies—Hamlet—Lear—Othello—sometimes a whole scene—with all the characters. He seemed to live again now that the power of speech had come back—even if these recitations were sometimes followed by an interval of delirium—not violent—but a lapse from Shakespeare into wandering speech—in which he seemed to be living in the past—suffering agitations and agonies that were too real to be merely hallucinations.

One August afternoon, when the room was steeped in sunshine, he stopped himself suddenly in the midst of Hamlet's first soliloquy, and looked at a lady in mourning, who was sitting by an open window opposite his bed.

"Is that the Duchess?" he asked quietly.

"Thank God, you remember me."

"Remember thee? Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe."

His voice changed to the dreamy tone of all his recent utterances, and he went on to the end of the soliloquy.

"Oh, my poor fellow, have you nothing more to say to me? This is the third day I have been sitting here, waiting for you to speak to your old friend. I came from Scotland to see you, Godwin—for no other reason."

He stretched out a feeble hand, and she knelt by his bed to take the wasted hand and kiss it.

"You are going to get well, and make Mrs. Merritt and me happy."

"Yes, I am well," he said eagerly, lifting his head from the pillow, and looking at her with wild eyes. "I have had plenty of rest—I shall be easier in 'Manfred' than I was last night. That was a nerve-shaking performance. We cut the soliloquies as close as we could—but they are too long. The play is almost a monologue. I shall not take it as slowly as I did last night."

The Duchess sat by the bed in silence for a little while, till he sank again into unconsciousness—and then she went away. She feared this awakening of ideas that must distress him.

She came on the next day, and on the next, and he knew her, and was pleased with her company; and from this time the improvement was marked. He talked no more of acting Manfred. He had been unconscious of the passage of time. He knew now that he had been seriously ill—and he made Renshaw tell him how long he had been lying in that room, and how he had been carried there, lifeless and unconscious.

Harvey had been to see him, and had been questioned about the end of the play.

"Was it very disgraceful? Did I finish the act? I don't remember. There is that long speech to the Abbot; I don't remember speaking one word of it."

"You spoke it beautifully. You held the audience all through the act. No one but Campion knew that you were ill."

"I'm glad of that. I'm glad the audience did not know."

Now that he was allowed to sit up for two or three hours in the afternoon, and to see people, his two clerical friends, O'Brien and Father Maurice, came very often. There was nothing disturbing in the society of either—for both had cultivated minds, and knew the kind of conversation that would interest without agitating the convalescent. The doctors were delighted. The recovery might seem slow to the patient's friends, but it was quicker than his physicians had hoped.

And now they began to talk of removing him to Wimbledon. Bedford Square was all very well—the healthiest situation in London—but at Mount Pleasant he would be out of the London smoke, and he could lie on a sofa in his garden—or go about the heath in a Bath chair.

"A Bath chair! The last resort of age and imbecility. Macbeth in a Bath chair! Benedick dragged about by a donkey! Heaven and earth!"

"Only till you have got your legs again, and can ride Zuleika," said Fenwick. "I shall see you scouring the common when I come to look you up—but you had better begin with the Bath chair."

Zuleika was a thoroughbred mare that had been given him by Lord Egremont: a disappointment in the racing stud, but almost too beautiful for a hack.

It was on the evening before the move to Wimbledon that O'Brien came at tea-time, and took his seat near Godwin with a graver countenance than usual.

Sarah had been pouring out the tea, but she left the room



in a few minutes—impressed by something in the aspect of the visitor.

“ I have been at Lavender Lodge for the best part of the day,” O’Brien said in a grave voice. “ I have been with Miss Fountain—who is very unhappy.”

“ And with Fanny ? ”

“ No—George—Fanny is not there. Your marriage came to an end nearly a month ago. The bond is broken.”

“ Why didn’t you tell me ? ”

“ I was forbidden to tell you anything sad or disturbing—while you were still a weakling.”

“ I am no longer a weakling. Tell me everything. My poor wife ! ”

He turned his face from the light, and O’Brien knew that he gave poor Fanny his tears.

“ Was her last illness long ? Did she suffer much at the end ? ”

“ No, her fatal illness was not long. Her indomitable pluck kept her in high spirits till the last. She was wonderful. She insisted on going to a fête at Vauxhall on the coldest night in July, an English midsummer night, with an east wind that cut like a knife. That was the *coup de grâce*. Inflammation of the lungs set in before the morning—and in five days she was gone.”

“ Poor Fanny ! ”

“ I saw her on the day of her death. She had rallied in a wonderful way. It was late in the afternoon. The windows were open to the south-west, and the room was full of sunshine. She was sitting up in bed, supported by pillows, and there was a great bowl of lilies on the table by her side.

“ She pointed to the flowers with her transparent hand.

“ ‘ He brought them,’ she said.

“ And then Miss Fountain told me how Fanny had written to Colonel Arden—only a few lines in pencil, and insisted on her note being taken to Carlton House by special messenger. The Prince had been there that morning. He had stayed nearly half an hour, and had been dreadfully distressed.

“ ‘ We have all got to die, my dear,’ he said. ‘ My turn may come soon. Who knows ? ’

“ And he had covered his face with his handkerchief as he hurried away, Miss Fountain said. In the midst of her grief, which is quite genuine, she was proud of the Regent’s visit.”

“ Poor Fanny. He was the man she loved,” Godwin said in a low voice, his eyes still covered with his wasted hand.

"No, George. He was the man she thought she loved—but it was the Prince, not the man, she cared for."

"My wife? What wife? I have no wife!" Godwin repeated in a low voice. Her face rose up before him as he had so often seen it, in those scenes in *Othello*, when she was on her knees at his feet, lovely in her pale distress. There was no guilty feeling in Godwin's heart in the long wakeful night—no gladness at release from bondage. Whatever he had felt a year ago when he rode into London to unburden his soul to Father Maurice was a feeling of the past. Fanny's death meant nothing to him now. His life was done—nothing remained of that fierce passion that had burnt in his heart when he called up the image of the woman he loved, with thought so concentrated and intense, that he had made her live, and seemed to hold her in his arms. The spell worked no more. Everything was over. His stage career was ended. This prostrate wretch that had to be lifted out of bed, and dressed like a child, and carried to an easy chair, to sit brooding through the long hours of the hopeless day—this was not Godwin. All the egotism of the actor's nature prevailed in those melancholy days—and he knew now that he had tasted the fullness of life only when he was acting.

"If Isabel had loved me it would not have been so," he told himself. "With her love I could have been happy in a desert—I could have turned my back upon the theatre—and all those dream-lives that were so fierce and fine while they lasted. I could have given them all up, if she had loved me. But she is incapable of love—a beautiful form—the perfection of nature—but made without a heart. A woman with a heart would have melted when she was in my arms—would have forgiven me, and been kind. Cold—colder than the moon! Endymion was happier than I."

He remembered what the Duchess had said, when she warned him against the folly of a platonic friendship. "It is you who will pay the price." He had paid the price with the life-blood of his lacerated heart.

Fanny's death had set him free; but Isabel was far off as ever, because she had never loved him.

He recalled all the letters he had written to her since they parted—letters that might have melted a heart of stone. What pages of passionate longing—what burning words—what a depth of despair! And she had vouchsafed no response—not one line to tell him he was pardoned, not one word to show that she was conscious of his existence, and wished him well.

Her scornful silence had crushed him—and now, when he was free, and could ask her to be his wife—pride came to his relief—the sense of self-respect—a man's natural resentment at having been unfairly used by a woman too conscious of her power.

There was no hope on that side. If Fame and Fortune were gone, Love had gone too.

He hummed the lines of Braham's song—a sailor's ditty that the inimitable tenor had sung between the pieces at Godwin's last benefit—pleased to do something for his friend.

“Here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom Bowling.”

“A sheer hulk.” That was all. To lie on a sofa in the garden through the autumn day—watching the little fleecy clouds in the blue vault above him; so feeble that it was an exertion to pat Hector's rough head—a tremendous effort to talk five minutes with the dear old mother, who sat by his sofa, busy with her needlework, and always cheerful; or to be dragged about the common in a Bath chair, drawn by an old man. He had not even the comfort of seeing a donkey in front of him. He, to whom all animals were dear, might have loved the donkey; but he could not love the old man.

His soul sank in an abyss of Stygian gloom. In all the darkness he could see no star.

He talked to his doctors, and by a fine piece of acting beguiled them into answering his searching questions with cruel candour. He appeared so cheerful, so reconciled to his state of health and its limitations. Should he ever act again?

They would be able to tell him about that after he had given himself a year of complete repose for mind and body.

Should he ever be the actor he had been?

As a comedian, yes, no doubt—as brilliant as ever. As a tragedian, perhaps not. Othello—or Richard—Lear or Macbeth demand a physique which he might never again possess. Such characters strain a man's nerves to breaking-point. Only the most robust can bear the strain.

This was the gist of all their talk. His day was done. He heard them discuss his condition, watched their faces with his grave smile, and they thought he was satisfied. He would play Benedick, and Malvolio, and would be happy.

“But not too soon, my dear Godwin. *Festina lente*,” said Sir David, who had been hastening slowly all his life.

No patient of Sir David Tranby's ever recovered in a hurry.

After that interview with the doctors he gave himself up to

despair. His day was done. Harvey, who in the first weeks of his convalescence came often to see him, and talked of the theatre, and the plays they could put in hand, "when you are getting your legs under you," now came no more. Fenwick, the theatrical doctor, had let the cat out of the bag in one of his long talks with Godwin. There was an Irishman—now the beloved of Dublin—a robustious tragedian who was making the chandelier drops shiver in the Theatre Royal—whom Harvey had gone to see, and whom he had talked of as an experiment for next season.

"I was Harvey's experiment," Godwin said. "Great Heaven, what ages ago! I have had a long life, Fenwick—long in force, if not in years. I ought to be satisfied."

Father Maurice came often to see him; and the hour in which the old priest sat beside him, and talked to him, and tried to convince him of things that were difficult and far off—was the happiest hour in a week of despondency. If the priest could not make him hope, he could at least give him fortitude, patience, submission to Fate, or to the Will of God.

Sarah Merritt noticed that her son's face had a happier look after an hour's talk with Father Maurice, and there was nothing she would not have done to prove her gratitude to the kind old man.

Patrick O'Brien also came often—and walked by Godwin's chair about the common, and talked of things that had a laugh in them, and laughed uproariously in his Irish way, at his own jokes and good stories—but he could not make Godwin laugh. The boyish laugh that had been the charm of his Charles Surface seemed for ever mute. There was nothing left but a smile—and it was now a saturnine smile.

If things could have continued as they were, his two friends, and the fond mother, and the devoted Renshaw, would have been content, and would have gone on trusting to time with hopeful minds. But as the autumn days shortened, and the wind across the common grew colder, there was a visible deterioration in the patient. He was much weaker, and he had less and less interest in the things about him. He could no longer sustain an argument with Father Maurice—and he did not even pretend to listen to O'Brien's good stories. He had fallen into a depth of depression that was painful to see; and he made no attempt to hide his melancholy from those who loved him. And with the overshadowing of his mind there had come a falling off in physical power. Fenwick and the physicians owned that they

had come to the end of their resources, and were unsatisfied with the patient's condition.

"It was unsatisfactory," that was the utmost Sir David would say, when Sarah pressed him with her anxious questions; but his face said more—a countenance that presaged death.

"What can we do for your son, my dear lady, if he has not the will to live?" said Sir David. "The patient must help us. Pray use all your influence—you may be able to save him."

"I saved him when he was a sickly infant," said Sarah, with streaming eyes; "but I could get nearer to him then. He was like a bit of myself. Now he is a mystery to me. I don't know his secrets—and I can only look on while he dies of a broken heart."

Sir David appeared next day with another white-haired physician, the renowned Sir Henry Halthorpe, who kept most of the nobility alive, and who came to see Godwin for sheer love of the great actor. He would have brought the last resources of his wisdom and experience to this patient's aid, but he could suggest no improvement upon Sir David's treatment—all he could say was that "our good Fenwick" must devote himself to the case, which was one that called for watchfulness and discretion.

For the rest, he shrugged his shoulders. "'Who can minister to a mind diseased?' How exquisitely the poor fellow spoke those words! Alas—we shall never see such a Macbeth again."

A mind diseased—or a broken heart, a distinction without a difference, Fenwick thought. He came to Mount Pleasant every day, and sat by his patient for a little while, and tried to cheer him with lively talk of the theatre and the great world. He gave this case his exclusive care, at the risk of spoiling a good family practice among the prosperous tradesmen in the heart of London—Covent Garden, King Street, Maiden Lane, Long Acre. He had loved the drama with an ardent love, from his student days at Bartholomew's, and had paid handsomely for his admission to the Drury Lane green-room, by attending the actors without fee or reward. No member of that numerous company had ever seen a doctor's bill while Fenwick attended them; and it was with unaffected reluctance that he had accepted Godwin's cheques. He came every day, and went away more despondent as the days wore on, and the white mists of November crept up from the Thames Valley.



He could not conceal his dejection from Sarah Merritt.

"Oh, my dear soul, what can medicine do for a man who doesn't want to live? Your son is weaker than I like to see him. He doesn't eat, he doesn't sleep. He is going downhill. Unless he takes a turn for the better——"

He left the sentence unfinished. The situation was tragic. There had been no improvement since they brought him from London. Wimbledon air had done nothing for him. The Bath chair had been given up. He was too weak to bear being carried up and down stairs. He lay on a bed that knew not the comfort of sleep—lay in a mournful silence, looking at the winter sky above the dark line of the fir wood towards Putney Hill. Nothing interested him, except a visit from Father Maurice, who came every two or three days, sat by the patient for a whole afternoon, and went away as despondent as the doctor.

The room where he lay was large and airy, with three windows facing the morning sun. It was prettily furnished, and the walls and draperies were light and cheerful-looking. But with increasing weakness his mind had wandered, and he thought he was in Lady Beaumont's library. That was his hallucination. He looked round the room where he had been lying for more than a month, while life was slowly ebbing; and he saw—not the white wall-paper sprinkled with rosebuds, not the three windows facing the east, but that London room lined with books in sumptuous bindings, furnished with dark mahogany bureaus and Queen Anne chairs—the room where he and Isabel had sat together in the lamplight through the quiet evenings. For him it was always evening. For his eyes, though the morning sun was full upon the room, there were only the red glow of cedar logs and the soft light of lamp and candles. He was in her favourite room; but she was not there. It had become his room—but it was full of the things she loved: her books, her desk, her work-table. He could read the titles of her books. One morning when his mother was standing by his bed, he pointed with his tremulous hand to a patch of sunlight on the opposite wall.

"Bring me that Shakespeare, dear—the first volume."

She looked at him hopelessly. He laid his hand upon her wrist.

"Don't you see, dear, the Shakespeare, a large book in red russia, with the Beaumont arms on the back—in ten volumes? Bring me the first volume. I want to verify a line in the 'Tempest.' 'Cloud-capped palaces, solemn towers'—no, that's

not right—on the fourth shelf from the bottom. You can't miss it."

What could she do? Tell him that there were no books in that room?

"I'll fetch the Shakespeare from your study—that little one with Fuseli's pictures, in small volumes, so easy for you to handle," she said. "Renshaw shall get it for you. He knows all about your books."

"I want Isabel's book—not mine. It is good of her to let me have her room."

Nothing could shake him. The hallucination was complete. His eyes saw the things that were not. He would lie for hours looking at the blank walls, and counting the books, and talking of them in ceaseless, wandering talk—going over their titles, repeating familiar passages—Milton's sonorous verse—scraps of Latin by Erasmus or More—passages from "Childe Harold"—Cowper—Pope.

Those who watched him saw that while his hallucination lasted he was more alive. The light came back to his eyes—his hand, though it was still tremulous, moved with more decision. He was in her room; sometimes he would lift himself up in his bed—now a great effort—and look eagerly at the half-open door—expecting her—but he never saw her. His illusion did not prevail so far. He saw the room in which he had been happy with her. He saw the things she loved, even in the minutest detail of form and colour—but she was far away. His sense of having lost her was too keen for even delirium to bring her back.

The intervals when the consciousness of outward things returned were his worst hours. For then his soul went down into the bottomless pit, to the darkness where there was no star.

Even his mother's tender words brought no answering smile, and he had no caress for his dog, the silent companion of those dull hours—a creature that could not be beguiled into leaving him.

There came a day when all pretence of hope was given up, and when Sarah Merritt moved about with a face so piteous that Fenwick, who was hardened by looking on at the agony of farewell hours, could not see her without pain. She was so quiet, so gentle in her despair. She looked in the faces of the doctors with such heartrending appeal—and they could give her no comfort.

Sir Henry Halthorpe and Sir David Tranby were both at

Mount Pleasant that morning—and neither of them had the heart to tell her that the end was near. They left that to Fenwick, who with infinite tenderness prepared her for the worst. Her son's life was now a question of hours.

Fenwick had not left the house for the last three days. All his prosperous shopkeepers were handed over to a locum tenens. New lives began which he had been expected to inaugurate. Nothing counted when weighed against this last flickering of the flame, this fading out of a genius who had held so large a place in the world of thinking people.

A long day—dreary hours unrelieved by hallucination. The beautiful room, rich in colour, the warmth of lamplight and fire, had vanished—and the white wall-paper, the white dimity curtains, the pale winter sky, showed cold and dim to Godwin's tired eyes. His mother and Renshaw sat near the foot of the bed, hidden by the curtains—for neither of them was in a state that were well for the sick man to see. The whiteness and the stillness were ghastly. He began to think that he was dead, had been lying there for a long time waiting for his coffin to be brought, and his wasted frame to be lifted into it. There was nothing terrible in death—only a vague idea that he was to pass out of that cold light into warm darkness under ground.

Someone opened the door with a stealthy hand, and Sarah came from behind the curtains, and crept across the room. There was a little whispered talk, for a minute or so; and then the door was shut in the same noiseless way.

His mother had gone. He found himself wondering why she left him. As if it mattered? Some household detail. He didn't want her to be long away. He must hold her hand at the last. He must tell her that he loved her, and was grateful.

He closed his eyes, and slept for a time that seemed long, though it was only a few minutes. He had long dreams in that short sleep. The cold white light was fading when he woke. Evening had come, and there were shadows in the room. Renshaw was gone. They had left him alone! Then he was surely dead.

No, not alone—a hand was laid upon his—a warm, living hand, a small, soft hand that clasped his with a strange fervour.

“ Oh, my love, my love ! ”

Her voice—there was no other like it in the whole world! He lifted himself up in his bed, and flung his arms round her

neck, and let his face fall upon her breast. The soft satin and lace, the sweet scent of roses, the rise and fall of a tumultuous heart! He felt it all—and he lived. The death-sentence was revoked.

If Sir Henry Halthorpe had been there—that man of wide experience and wider intellect—he would have known that this was the cure. This was the shock that had been wanted to bring back life.

“Oh, my love, my love.”

“Oh, my adored, my angel.”

Such words as these—so many foolish words—were all they could say to each other for a long time.

Fenwick came by and by, and preached his little sermon. Lady Beaumont must not stay any longer with his patient. She must come away—and dine—and rest. She had travelled straight from Naples—she had not halted on the way. Her days and nights had been spent in a post-chaise and on board ship. She must be worn out with such a journey. But she might come back later in the evening, and wish the patient good night, and stay with him perhaps for a few minutes.

She submitted without a word. She rose from the chair where she had been sitting close to his bed—and bent over him, and spoke in a voice too low to be heard by Fenwick, who stood discreetly by the door, ready to escort her downstairs.

“You have called me many sweet names, George,” she said—“sweet, foolish names—but not the best of all.”

“What is that, dear love?”

“Call me wife—that is to be my name by and by.”

“My wife.”

His arms were round her neck, and his tears were hidden on her breast.

Fenwick heard the hoarse sob.

“Come, Lady Beaumont,” he said severely. “You were sent for to cure my patient. I mustn’t let you kill him.”

Isabel spent the night at Mount Pleasant, sitting with Sarah Merritt, in the parlour downstairs, while Fenwick and Renshaw watched the patient. He was more tranquil than his doctor expected him to be after the agitation of that evening hour, and he had intervals of sleep. But there were hours of restlessness and wandering. Yet it seemed to Fenwick that even in his wandering he was conscious of the happy change that had come into his life. The low murmurs from those pale lips were

of a soul in paradise. "Dead and in heaven—in heaven with Isabel." "Friend, love, wife!" How often he repeated that one word—Wife—"My wife!" And again the familiar words were murmured, "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy."

Renshaw stole downstairs several times in the long night to the parlour where the two women were sitting by the fire, talking in whispers. He brought them the latest news of the patient. Dr. Fenwick thought there was an improvement. His pulse was stronger. He had taken a cup of soup. Later he was asleep, and his breathing was easier. Fenwick went to the parlour himself at five o'clock, and chid the two women for sitting up all night.

"Do you think my hands are not full enough with one critical case?" he said. "I thought you were a sensible person, Mrs. Merritt, and would have taken more care of Lady Beaumont after her journey."

"Mrs. Merritt has been all kindness, Doctor—but what would have been the use of my going to bed? I should not have slept for a moment. Is he really, really better? Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, he is better. There is every sign of a rally. I begin to think that there was nothing the matter with him in the last six weeks but an obstinate determination not to live. That's what Sir Henry Halthorpe said of him yesterday morning. 'What can I do for a patient who doesn't mean to live?' If you are to help in his cure, Lady Beaumont, you may thank your stars you didn't wait till to-morrow."

"Was he so very low?"

"I was counting his life by moments. I did not think he would last till midnight."

Isabel was allowed to see the patient for a little while next morning—and later in the day Fenwick let her sit with him for half an hour by the clock. Her first visit had done him good, as he had been more tractable in the way of taking the food that was prescribed for him—the beaten-up eggs, and milk, and other insipidities of the sick man's diet. He was not even allowed to sit up in bed; but was to lie supine while she talked to him, and she had been warned against talk that would agitate or distress him.

"What did Fenwick mean, Isabel? You were sent for? Who sent for you?"



"The best friend I have on earth. Oh, George, if it had not been for him I should not have known. I was in the south of Italy—at Posilipo—a week's journey. If I had not had his letter!"

She kept back her tears, remembering Fenwick's instructions.

"Who was the friend?"

"Father Maurice, my director—who has known every thought of my mind ever since I was left alone in the world. He knew of our friendship, George. How could I keep that from him when it was the greatest part of my life?"

"And he wrote to you?"

"Yes. He told me that you were ill—an illness more of the mind than of the body—that you were desolate and alone. He told me that dear as your mother was—and dearly as you loved her—something more was wanted to fill your life. He thought that as we had been such close friends I might be of help to you. In half an hour after I read his letter I had started on my journey—and I never stopped till I came to this house last night."

"Oh, my love, my love. You are wonderful!"

"Do you think I could hesitate? Luckily for me I had a clever courier in my service—a man who has been all over Italy, and in Greece and Palestine, with Malcolm and me. There was no difficulty. I had only to sit in a carriage—or lie in my berth on board a ship. There was nothing heroic."

"That good old man! I knew he was my friend. I went to him in a time of mental agony, and he helped me. And now he has given me back to life."

"He loves you, George—and he thinks that he has won you. He thinks that he has brought a beautiful soul out of darkness into light."

"Did he tell you that my wife was dead?"

"Yes."

"Time is up," said Dr. Fenwick, looking in at the door.  
"Come, Lady Beaumont."

Isabel obeyed without a word—and for the next four or five days Godwin and his guest submitted to every order of the kindly doctor.

She saw her lover many times in the day—but was never allowed to be with him long—since it was difficult to restrain him from exciting talk. He had such worlds to say to her. "Three years of pent-up thoughts," he told her.

In all that time she was never far away from him. With Sarah's help she had found comfortable lodgings for herself,

her Italian maid, and a footman, at a farm-house within ten minutes' walk of Mount Pleasant. It was a small dairy-farm, and the mistress boasted of having supplied cream and new-laid eggs to Mr. Pitt in his last years.

Living nominally at Fir Tree Farm, Isabel spent most of her life with the convalescent, to whom every day and almost every hour brought a revival of the joy of life. The change from the man who wanted to die to the man who wanted to live was wonderful. From apathy to a keen interest in all things—tremendous or trivial—from a convulsion in European politics, to the belated sulphur butterfly that flitted across the garden, deluded by the transient warmth of December sunshine. Everything pleased him—the garden, when he was just able to creep about the grass, leaning on his malacca cane, with Isabel's arm through his; the common, and the country round when he was strong enough for a daily drive in her open carriage, which had been brought out of its long seclusion and accommodated at Mount Pleasant, with a good pair of horses from Godwin's London jobmaster. The winter was mild, and there were few days too cold for the barouche, and the revivifying air on the heath. But when January brought hard weather, and the lovers were snow-bound, the days spent in a solitude of two were perhaps the happiest of all. It was now that Godwin tasted the ultimate perfection of earthly joy. He had been fortunate in life. He had realised his dream. He had achieved extraordinary success in a profession in which to succeed is to taste the strong wine of life; but not till now had he known the deep content of desires satisfied that had seemed hopeless: never till now the rapture of the present hour, the joy that does not look before and after.

They were together for hours in an unbroken *tête-à-tête*. They talked in Godwin's study as they had talked in the library in Spring Gardens, of all things under heaven, but there was no restraint, no fear of a look too ardent or a word too tender. They belonged to each other. Nothing could come between them now. They were to be married in the last week of July, in the chapel by Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Father Maurice was to perform the ceremony, Godwin being received into the Roman Catholic Church on the eve of his wedding-day.

Their honeymoon was to be spent at Glenroy, that mediæval manor-house which was to be their dearest home—but they were to spend the following winter in Italy, with perhaps a month in Greece. All Godwin's unsatisfied longings for the

divinest scenes of earth—impossible for him while he was an actor—were to be gratified now that he had done with the theatre. He had done with the theatre. That factitious life which had once seemed the only life worth living, had been renounced without a pang. In Isabel's society he forgot that he had been an actor. She read Shakespeare to him sometimes for hours at a stretch, when she feared he might waste his strength by over-much talking—and he delighted in the great scenes, without a thought of the stage, without one desire to be speaking those well-remembered lines, and carrying an audience along with him.

In this calm haven of a satisfied love he could let the strong sea of man's ambition, the eager struggle for supremacy, roll on and pass him by. He read without a pang of the Irish actor's success in some of his own great parts. He was glad that they were doing well at the theatre, which had once depended upon him alone. Susan Latimer and Jessie Vernon had come to the front, and the Irish tragedian was a favourite with pit and gallery.

"You were like a great gas-lamp among a lot of tallow candles," O'Brien said gaily. "When the lamp went out, the skinny little dips began to flare up and make believe to shine."

Mr. O'Donnel's bellowing in "Othello" and "Macbeth," Miss Vernon's pert prettiness in comedy, Susan Latimer's rough power in melodrama, had kept the theatre alive. There were no such audiences as in Godwin's reign—but Drury Lane was not bankrupt.

The clerical friends and Dr. Fenwick were the only visitors—Fenwick came every day. Such constant attention was no longer needed by the patient, but it had become a habit to see Godwin.

"Not a professional visit," the good man would say cheerily, as he put down his hat. "I find I can't get on without a morning ride, and I flatter myself my hireling gets over the ground a bit faster than Sir David's two-hundred-guinea cob."

O'Brien and Father Maurice came two or three times a week—and were often there together—always good friends, though they sometimes gave themselves the pleasure of a fiery argument in which the Pope generally came out on top—as the priest defied the Protestant vicar to prove that his so-called Church was really a Church or anything like a Church. Godwin rarely interrupted their duologue; but when he did strike in, it seemed to his old friend and tutor that he came on the side of the enemy.

It was Sarah Merritt's delight to supervise and assist in the cooking when the priest and parson dined at Mount Pleasant, and those gentlemen declared that there were no better feasts at the Mansion House.

In all her confidential talk with Godwin, Isabel had hardly spoken of Malcolm Crawford, except to say that he was still in Rome, where he had been living since last October. Godwin had asked no questions. For him Malcolm was a sleeping dog that had best be let alone. But now that within a few months he was to be Isabel's husband, it seemed well that he should know what his relations with her brother were likely to be. That Malcolm could ever be his friend he thought impossible. The young man had shown a dogged and unalterable dislike—scorn of the actor, distrust of the man. But he was Isabel's brother, and she loved him—and for her sake Godwin would have done much to bring about a happier state of things.

As soon as his patient was well enough to sit on a horse, Fenwick suggested that he and Lady Beaumont might ride together; so Zuleika was taken in hand by Godwin's groom, and broken in for the side-saddle. She was almost as gentle as Byron's heroine, and the breaking in was an easy matter; so the lovers soon exchanged their drives for long rambles on horseback.

It was during one of their sauntering rides over the turf in Richmond Park that Godwin approached the subject of his future brother-in-law.

"You have told me nothing of Malcolm," he said. "And now that he is to be my brother, I am interested in all that can happen to him. Is he coming to London this year? Will he be at our wedding?"

"I don't know. I shall ask him to come over. But if he would rather spend the summer in the Pyrenees, as he did last year—I won't try to bring him home."

He saw a look of distress in the face that he loved to watch.

"Dearest, if it pains you to talk of him, I will ask no more questions. You know that whatever happens, your wish will be my law."

"My unhappy brother. Yes, it is painful to speak of him—but there are things that must be said. If I could tell you what my life was with my mother in her last year on earth, if I could make you understand how I loved her, and what we had been to each other, you would not wonder that I have always held myself bound to bear anything from Malcolm rather than to

fail in my promise to her. There have been bitter moments in these last years that he and I have spent alone together, wandering in search of peace where there was no peace. His jealousy of you began from that first night when I admired your acting, and it has been a corroding poison ever since. Nothing could convince him, while we were travelling together, that I was not in constant correspondence with you. He watched all my letters—those I wrote and those I received, and he had a rooted idea that there were other letters that came secretly—letters from you. I will not say he had delusions—but he had suspicions so groundless that they touched the border-line of sanity. When we returned to Rome last September, some strange caprice made him seek out Father Anselm, by whose authority he had been banished from the monastery on the Aventine—but to whom my brother now attached himself with a sudden fervour that astonished me, remembering his deep resentment in the past. When this association between penitent and father confessor had been going on for some time, I received a letter from the Superior, asking me to call on him alone. The word was underlined. I went at the hour he named, and was received with great kindness.”

She paused, and Godwin respected her silence.

“The priest’s face was so benevolent, his manner so kind and gentle, that I could not believe he had willingly wronged my brother. He told me that he had loved him, and was sorry for him—but that seeing him again after so long an interval, he was more than ever convinced that his mind was seriously affected—that he was now in a worse condition, mentally, than when he, Father Anselm, felt himself constrained to exclude him from the brotherhood, and he urged upon me the necessity of placing him under some kind of supervision, if not actual restraint. He had heard from Malcolm that we were wandering about the world together, and he considered that my position was not without danger. I tried to make him understand what my brother was to me—and the sacred nature of the charge that I had taken upon myself. He persisted in his opinion, and I had to promise him that I would act upon his advice.”

“You would not believe me when I gave you the same counsel.”

“I did not believe Father Anselm. If my brother’s state of mind were far worse than it ever has been, I would be his constant companion—without a thought of fear; but the Superior told me that for Malcolm’s own sake I ought to place him where



he could be guarded against the possibility of some rash act. He hinted darkly at some dreadful memory that might make life unbearable and drive him to suicide—and from that moment my mind was full of fear.”

And then, after a silence, she told him what she had done. She had friends in Rome, kind friends who were able to help her. In one of these, a man of exalted rank and long experience, the doctor of highest standing in the city, and during a visit she confided, and by his means she was made acquainted with to her as his patient, it was contrived that he should see her brother and converse with him for some time, first about the sister's health, and then upon the clerical world, the Holy Father, and the undercurrents of life at the Vatican.

As the result of this interview, in which Malcolm had argued in a heated manner, and shown himself full of strange ideas, the physician told Lady Beaumont that there was no evidence of insanity—from a legal point of view—nothing that would justify confinement in a lunatic asylum, public or private; but he told her that the case was grave, and needed all the care that the situation allowed. At his advice she engaged an Italian doctor, a young man with some experience in mental cases and the highest credentials, to act as Malcolm's so-called secretary and his constant companion. This must prove an onerous position, requiring exceptional tact and patience; but its holder was to be so generously remunerated that Signor Perelli—a bachelor of nine-and-twenty, with no private means—at once declared himself willing to exchange the emoluments of his practice in one of the poorer quarters of Rome for a situation in which he might save money, while living in comfort at his patient's expense.

“The young man is engaged to the daughter of a Perugian noble,” Isabel said, at the end of her story, “and will only be allowed to marry her when he has saved enough to buy a practice in a fashionable neighbourhood, and to furnish an apartment worthy of the young lady's birth—so you see he has every inducement to behave honourably. He knows that I am able to reward him, and that I love my brother very dearly. He hopes to win Malcolm's affection, and he will play his part of secretary and assistant in his patient's literary work.”

“The book is not finished?”

“Malcolm's book—no. He worked at it by fits and starts even while we were moving about—on board ship—in a travelling carriage—making notes—jotting down ideas—intensely in-

terested for the moment—but then the old despondent mood has come over him—and I have found him in the depth of gloom, with a heap of torn manuscript scattered at his feet. He complained that he could never attain his ideal—that he would rather die unknown and unregretted, than publish a book beneath the grandeur of his theme. A noble ambition, is it not, George? To do some great work for the Church that repudiated him!”

“Yes, dearest—a worthy ambition,” Godwin said—while unspoken there came the thought “Mad—mad—mad!”

What though the Roman physician could find no evidence of lunacy—no delusions—no absolute aberration? This man was mad. The doctor had looked for legal lunacy—the lunacy that justifies the sufferer’s friends in shutting a man out of the world of the living. But might there not be deeper-seated evil than could be diagnosed in an interview of an hour? A twist in the mind—born with the man—as much a part of him as any bodily distortion. From all he had seen of Malcolm Crawford Godwin was convinced that under that melancholy exterior there was this congenital lunacy—and that there would come a day when it would culminate in some fatal act.

“How sad you look, dearest,” Isabel said, after a long silence. “For my own part I feel quite easy about Malcolm now that he has a clever young man for his companion. He took to Signor Perelli from their first interview, finding him intelligent, and an ardent student, well read in theology and the history of the Roman Church. There could not have been a more fortunate choice. You need not fear any trouble from my brother’s society when we are married. Glenroy is his birthplace, you see, dear, the home where his childhood was spent—and I think he loves every stone of the old house, and every tree that grows near it. Glenroy is a large house—much larger than it looks. There is the Douglas wing that he can have for his own use—and where he can live as he likes—with plenty of room for him and Signor Perelli, and his servants. With his solitary ways we shall not have too much of his company. You won’t object to his living under our roof?”

She asked the question falteringly, as if she feared there would be difficulty.

“Object! To have you for my wife is to have all in this world that I have longed for. If your brother will let me be his friend, he shall have no occasion to complain of want of consideration on my part.”

"You will find everything easy when he knows that you are to be received into his Church."

"Does he know that we are to be married before the end of next month?"

"I wrote to him ever so long ago. I did not keep him in the dark."

"And did he answer kindly?"

"More than kindly. He expressed himself delighted at the prospect of our marriage. He praised you with real warmth."

"May I see his letter?"

"Certainly."

This was one of their serious conversations. And it was not often that they were serious. Their happiness bubbled over in light and joyous talk. The June weather, the beauty of their rural surroundings—the garden at Mount Pleasant, and Sarah Merritt's newly developed talent as a gardener, ever intent upon improvements—everything delighted them. And there was that endless talk of the future which is the supreme delight of lovers—the scenes they were to visit—the exquisite scenes—the places of history and legend where she had wandered with Malcolm for her silent companion—or alone and melancholy—trying to interest herself in the shadows of the heroic past, or the fables of poets—all of which would be glorified when she saw them, standing by his side—leaning upon his arm. How sweet it was to think that he would be seeing them for the first time—that she would open the gates of an enchanted world for him.

"You will find me a useful guide," she said. "Being so unhappy, study was my only relief, and wherever we went I read every book I could get upon the history, the art, and literature of the place. You will laugh at me for a blue-stockings."

Once only had he reproached her for her unkindness, in withholding even one little word of pardon or regret. Everything had been forgiven from the moment in which he found her sitting by that which was to have been his death-bed. He had scarcely reproached her. He had only questioned. Why, oh, why, had she been so cruel—why not have answered one of those despairing letters?

"Because I dared not," she told him. "You don't know what women suffer when love calls them with an irresistible power—while duty, religion, self-respect hold them back. My director warned me of danger even at the beginning of our

friendship, when I had not one thought that I could not tell him without a blush. He warned me later that I was on the brink of sin—mortal sin—the loss of my eternal peace. He was severe in his condemnation of my life—and I thought him cruel—that mild and benevolent counsellor with whom I had always found help. He said there could be no help for me if I would not help myself. I had no right to walk through fire and think that I could be unscorched. And when you came to me that miserable morning—when you dropped the mask—I knew that he was right—and that my only hope of escaping sin was to part from you for ever. There could be no compromise, George—no half-measures. I loved you! I loved you! When the door shut, my heart cried out to you—I wanted to call you back—to call you back at the risk of my salvation. But I was brave—and I stood and heard your steps going downstairs—slowly, slowly—I counted your footsteps, and I heard the hall door shut, and I knew all the joy of my life had gone out with you. And when your letters came—those passionate letters, the call of love—I read them, and cried over them, and kissed them before I burnt them. I dared not answer—I dared not keep them, lest I should read them over and over again, till I went mad, and wrote just three words, ‘Come to me.’”

It was not till this confession that he knew how he had been loved—and after this they talked often of the past, and with an unblushing egotism he led her on to tell him of the gradual growth of love—the subtle transition from a delight in his art and an innocent pleasure in his society, to the master-passion of her life.

“My husband and I had never been lovers,” she told him, “though I was happy in my married life. We were united by sympathy, by congenial tastes, by religion. We were friends. And it was my memory of that tranquil association which made me offer you my friendship.”

The days went by, the June days—the time of roses—and if perfect felicity were possible for the earth-born it would have been Godwin’s in this golden year. But so obstinate is the human mind in finding sorrow where there should be no sorrow—and fear where there should be no fear—that this darling of the Gods had bad dreams. In the vision of his future life—the radiant vision of a wedded love—there was one cloud that fell across his sunshine—the brooding shadow of Malcolm Crawford, that dreary fanatic whose affection for his sister

might at any hour show itself in jealous fury, and turn against the creature he loved.

He was to live under the same roof with her. He could find his way to her at any hour. She would never shut her door against him. What though he was to live in seclusion, under the watchful eye of a medical attendant? What care could ensure safety?

The tragic story of Mary Lamb was fresh in Godwin's mind. If a creature so gentle could change her nature in an instant, and plunge a knife into a mother's bosom, what homicidal paroxysm was impossible in Malcolm's gloomy nature? He would see them together in their happy union, the man he had always hated, and the sister from whom he had claimed more than a sister's love. Would he look upon their bliss and possess his soul in patience? Would he consent to be the second in Isabel's consideration?

This was the shadow that fell across Godwin's felicity, in those sleepless hours when horrors that have no place in the daylight "abuse the curtained sleeper."

The thought of the Douglas wing—that low-browed stone building, which had once been fortified against the English foe—haunted him. He had only seen the house from the outside, but this oldest portion of the building had left upon him an impression of abiding gloom. The small deep-set windows, with their heavy mullions, were made to shut out the sun. The low ceilings were supported by massive beams of black oak—the panelling was dark—an abode of night.

But after all, Crawford's residence there was not inevitable. Isabel had but to be convinced that Glenroy would be too dismal a home for him—and she would make other arrangements. Her desire was for his welfare. Better far that he should live in a land of sunshine—in that Italy where his religion was everybody's religion, instead of being looked on with distrust and aversion, as it was for the most part in Scotland.

It was within a month of their wedding—when stage-manager Harvey appeared unexpectedly one sunny morning and found Godwin and Isabel sitting in the garden, the lady bending over a large embroidery frame, and occupied with an elaborate piece of work copied from an old Italian vestment, brought by her from Genoa, and intended for a cope for Father Maurice. The original vestment was nearly three hundred years old, and was exquisite in design and work—time having taken nothing from it but richness of colouring. Godwin had been



reading to his fiancée while she worked, and Hector was stretched flat upon the turf at his master's feet, like a dead dog, in that attitude which signifies absolute content. It was a little domestic picture, and appealed to Harvey's feelings—being something new to the man of strenuous toil and incessant movement. Never had there been time in his twenty years of stage-management for him to sit at ease and read to his wife—and never had his bustling, money-saving spouse leisure or inclination to sit still and listen to him.

The little picture—the two faces in the sunlight, both beautiful, both refined and delicate, gave him an impression of what wealth and leisure might mean.

It was generally known that George Godwin was to marry the rich Lady Beaumont—and that he had gone over—or was going over—to Rome.

"He was bound to end badly," Campion said, when the news was discussed in the green-room. "I bear him no malice. We shed each other's blood. That wiped out all injuries."

Mr. Harvey apologised for intruding his prosaic person upon so idyllic a scene—but he had come upon a matter of business—urgent business. He came as an emissary from the Drury Lane Committee, who had heard of Godwin's approaching marriage, and, while they rejoiced in his happiness, were deeply afflicted at losing his services.

"They have got on very well without me," Godwin said, smiling. "They have your Irish genius."

"A stop-gap—a flash in the pan. He has tided us over the spring, and we have not had to shut the theatre—but we have never played to full houses since his first week. Take my word for it, Godwin, the fellow is a success of a single season. We must have something better for the autumn."

Harvey proceeded to unfold his business. If Godwin was really leaving the stage—which would be a national calamity—if his lines henceforth were to be laid in far different scenes—he must at least take his farewell of the drama in a proper manner, as Mrs. Siddons had done, and as her brother intended to do. The Committee, the company, every servant of the theatre, down to the drudge that swept the passages, were intent upon offering him their homage, in the shape of a testimonial, which was to be presented to him upon the night of his farewell performance. The money had been subscribed—yes—even to the nethermost drudge's sixpence. The engravers were at work upon a massive silver vase, designed by

Chantrey, with a Latin inscription by Canning. All Godwin had to do was to fix the date of his performance—and to choose the play in which he would appear.

Isabel had watched her lover's face while the stage-manager talked. She had pushed aside her embroidery frame—and was standing beside Godwin's chair, with her right hand resting lightly on his shoulder. She had watched his face intently from the beginning. She had seen it light up, as if the mere thought of the theatre fired him—and then, all at once, she saw the face sadden.

"I would rather not," he said abruptly, with a nervous quickness of speech. "I would rather not, Harvey. Say all that's civil on my part to the Committee, but tell them I have done with the stage. I am on the threshold of a happier life. I am to be received into a Church which does not look kindly on stage-players."

"And you are ashamed of having been the greatest actor of the century?" said Harvey.

"Ashamed?" cried Godwin, starting to his feet, and standing straight and strong beside Isabel. "Ashamed of the art for which I lived, until I found that there was something in life better and higher than art? Ashamed? No, Harvey, I am proud of Drury Lane, and all that it has given me—grateful to you, and to the Committee—grateful perhaps most of all for the sweeper's sixpence."

"And he will make his farewell appearance—as Kemble is going to do," Isabel said. "He is well, and strong, and he will love to tell his audience that he is grateful for the regard they have shown him, ever since he first acted before them."

Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were full of light. Harvey saw that she was proud of her stage-player. Everything was settled in a few minutes—the date fixed—just three days before his marriage. He was to appear in "Hamlet," the part in which he had first faced a London audience.

"Oh, how long ago that night seems," he told Isabel, when Harvey had left them. "Not years—but æons. I have lived many lives since then. A life of dull despair, in which I thought you far off as the stars are—a life of quiet happiness, in which I had your dear company and called myself your friend—a life of storm and passion—and then again despair—deeper and deeper gloom—and now this exquisite calm—felicity without a cloud."

The brooding figure in the Douglas wing was forgotten.

After that interview with Harvey Isabel realised, perhaps for the first time, how Godwin loved his art, and how much he was giving up for her sake.

He rode into London next day, and he met Isabel at dinner in his gayest spirits. He had spent hours at the theatre, arranging the cast of "Hamlet," the scenery, and other details.

He talked of the theatre all through dinner—the odiousness of it—the atmosphere saturated with dust—the odour of drains and candle-grease.

"To think that I could have spent the rest of my life there and thought myself happy. There is poor old Campion getting on for sixty—who is to play the King—and will go on playing the King till he drops dead on the steps of his throne. He has grown grey between Drury Lane and Surrey Street, where he lives. I doubt if he has ever seen a green field or a hedgerow-flower since he came to London forty years ago. And if it had not been for you, Isabel, my life might have been like his."

"How can you say such a thing, Monkey," cried Sarah, "when your first thought after you got rich was to find a country home for my old age? He has always loved woods and rivers and all beautiful things, Lady Beaumont. He used to roam about the pretty places round London in the starlight with Mr. O'Brien."

"I was reared in the loveliest bit of England, thanks to this dear friend," Godwin said, in a low voice.

One element in his happiness had been the sympathy between his adoptive mother and the woman who was to be his wife. The differences of birth and breeding, education and experience, counted for nothing with these two. They understood each other, and they loved Godwin. All was said in that.

Isabel watched her lover as the days went by, and could but see how his thoughts had gone back to the theatre. He spent hours of solitude in severe study. He, who had played "Hamlet" until every word of the text must have been engraven on his mind, devoted long mornings to repetition of the familiar speeches and scenes—to patient exercise of the voice that had been weakened by his long illness. The power was not gone—but all his old art, the art of his boyish efforts in the pine woods and on the lonely pathways by the Forest river, was needed to restore that wonderful organ to its fullest compass and expression. Once having pledged himself to reappear upon the stage from which he had been carried like a

dead man, nearly a year ago, he was resolute not to appear at a disadvantage.

All his self-love was at stake. The failure of that one night would be a lifelong humiliation. Not for worlds would he have Isabel's last memory of him as an actor record anything less than a stage triumph.

He was sorry he had consented to act again; but having consented, he devoted all his energies to the attempt, and in the ten days after Harvey's visit he could think of nothing but "Hamlet." The idyllic life with his betrothed was in abeyance. No more sauntering rides in Richmond Park. Zuleika was being exercised by a groom. Isabel, for whom the house in Spring Gardens had long been ready, had left Fir Tree Farm, much to the relief of her maid and footman—who had suffered from shortcomings of which their mistress was hardly conscious.

Godwin had gone back to Bedford Square, in order to be near the theatre for the last rehearsal and the eventful night. Mount Pleasant was to be left to the gardener and stable-helper—a house of darkness.

"Poor old house, where I have been so miserable and so happy," Godwin said, standing by the gate with Isabel, and looking back at the deserted garden, on the morning of departure.

Her carriage was waiting for her in front of the gate, and his hack was ready saddled for him to ride to London. He was to dine in Spring Gardens, and to tell her the last news of the theatre. To-morrow was the night of farewell.

All the arrangements for their marriage had been settled. They were to be married in the early morning, and were to start for Scotland from the chapel door. The post-horses were ordered for the journey, and rooms engaged at the inns where they were to stop. Renshaw and Lady Beaumont's maid were to travel by slower stages, in charge of the luggage; but Hector was to go with his master. Everything had been made easy, and Isabel thought with delight of the long, slow journey, they two alone, through a land of summer.

Only one anxious thought jarred with this happy time, and that came from an old source of trouble. She had been longer than usual without news of Malcolm; and his last letter had disquieted her. There had been something superfluous in his felicitations, some touch of irony in the expression of his desire for her future happiness. Under the smooth words, the hyper-

bolic praise of her lover, there had been something that made her think of an adder's head darting out of a thicket of flowering gorse—the vivid gold of the blossoms, the black head of the snake.

She had written urgently to Signor Perelli, asking for his latest news of her brother. No particulars as to his state of mental health were to be withheld from her. But the transmission of letters between Rome and London was intolerably slow; and it might be some time after her marriage before the Italian doctor's reply could reach her.



## CHAPTER XXXI

NEVER had there been such an audience since the theatre was built. That is what Harvey, with his hat on the back of his head, went about telling people while that farewell performance was in progress, and while Stormont's majestic bass was vibrating from wing to wing in the murdered father's appeal to his son. Harvey had said the same thing so often before, bustling in and out of the green-room, hurrying along the familiar passages, that perhaps no one was particularly impressed by the statement. Everybody knew that there was hardly room for a mouse in that vast arena—tier above tier of excited humanity. Everybody was there. All the devoted admirers who had seen the actor in every one of his impersonations—not once but often—and that vast aggregate of people who were not play-goers, but who were determined to be present on this prodigious occasion—as at a Coronation or a Royal Funeral—witnesses of an event to be remembered in years to come—to be described to children yet unborn. Some there were who had never seen Godwin—some who had never been in a play-house before—but who broke every rule of conscience—waived every deep-seated prejudice—for this unique representation.

There had been a five o'clock dinner in Bedford Square—a dinner at which only Godwin's closest friends were present—the Duchess of Pentland, Father Maurice, Patrick O'Brien, and the two doctors who had been drawn very near the actor in the last year, the men who had watched his slow recovery with more than professional solicitude.

"I could hardly have been more anxious about you if you had been my son," said Sir David, which was a safe assertion from a dry-as-dust old bachelor.

Godwin had his duchess on his right, and his wife of next week on his left hand. Fenwick watched him anxiously, a little doubtful as to the wisdom of this farewell appearance. Such occasions are a severe test even for the strongest; and

here was a man plucked from the jaws of death, and who could have no reserve force to bear the strain.

But there were those nerves of steel, that tremendous will-power which had carried George Godwin through all the difficult stages of his career, and of which Fenwick knew more than most people. No, there was nothing to fear! The theatrical doctor took his bumpers of champagne, and joined in the joyous talk, only glancing occasionally at his patient, whose face had the electrical look of a man in whom the spirit has detached itself from the flesh.

"Is this to be the last of your hospitalities?" the Duchess asked, when Godwin sat down, after thanking his friends for drinking success to the night's work. "Are we to have no more dinners, no more suppers, in this fine old room?"

"Yes, Duchess, this is the last time I shall welcome my friends in this room. Bedford Square has no *raison d'être* without Drury Lane. My mother prefers Wimbledon, and this house will know us no more—but wherever I have a home, my friends will always be welcome—more than ever welcome now that I shall have a wife to receive them."

After this there was a general movement towards the hall, and Godwin ran off to the hackney-coach in which Renshaw was waiting for him.

The others would follow at their leisure—Lady Beaumont's carriage and Sir David Tranby's were both waiting.

July has its surprises, as April has—and after glorious mid-summer weather there had come a dismal change to rain—a long day of rain in which the umbrellas of the needy are only sieves to let the water through. Torrential rain and a leaden sky had prevailed from early morning to late afternoon, and seemed likely to continue till night.

"This will keep a good many people out of the theatre," said Sir David, who hated rain, and cherished his hat.

"Not a mortal," protested Fenwick. "There may be a handsome crop of catarrh and rheumatism next week to keep me busy, but there won't be a spare seat at Drury Lane to-night."

The Duchess and Lady Beaumont sat together in the box where Godwin had so often looked for inspiration—the box that had been a spot of painful remembrance in the last bitter years. They were to sit there quietly till the end of the third act, and then Mr. Harvey was to take them behind the scenes. He was to take them to his private room, where his wife would

give them tea, and where Godwin would meet them, after his most arduous scene.

The play-scene was what it had always been—tremendous. Everybody in the pit was standing, closely packed, shoulder touching shoulder, handkerchiefs waving, a clamour of applause and cheering, hoarse shouts, shrill hurrahs, women sobbing, girls fainting in the crowd.

Lady Beaumont and the Duchess followed Harvey along the devious passages from the grand tier to the back of the great building, with anxious feelings. "Was not such an ordeal too much for the strength of any man? Could he bear it?"

The question was answered when he met them on the threshold of the manager's room, with welcoming hands and his radiant smile. Renshaw had made him presentable. There was no trace of paint on the pale face—no perturbed expression. All was calm and happy.

"You look extraordinarily tranquil after that storm and fury," said the Duchess; while Isabel held his hand in silence.

"Have I not good reason to be tranquil? The fiery dream is over. What a dream it has been—only a dream! The reality will be sweeter. The real life is coming." And then, almost in a whisper, "With you I shall not fear old age—I shall not shudder at grey hairs—I shall have nothing to lose. Time can take nothing from me while I have you."

His words were only for Isabel. The Duchess had moved away, and left them standing side by side. She was talking to the doctors and to Mrs. Harvey, a fussy matron, who had devised this tea-party, as her chance of being introduced to Lady Beaumont and Godwin's duchess—her only chance. She had brought out her household treasures—a tea-service presented to the stage-manager after a prosperous season—and she had made the official room gay with flowers.

Fenwick had come from the front of the house. He was in high spirits. He felt his patient's pulse, and put his ear against his chest to listen to his heart.

"That will do," he cried. "We patched him up, Lady Beaumont. We made a good job of him. He is as strong as ever he was. He may live to be as old as Macklin, and take his final farewell as Lear when the rosy-cheeked girls in the dress circle are old women."

Isabel was delighted to be behind the scenes, for the first time in her life. Every detail in that mysterious world interested her—even the dark passages, and the odd, unexpected

stairs here and there, where Harvey's guiding hand was necessary. The tea-drinking was pleasant, but it had to be a short business. The call-boy's voice was heard outside the room, and Godwin would be wanted almost immediately.

"Harvey will take you to your box," he told Isabel, "and he will be there to bring you to the green-room after the play—that is if you really want to see the presentation."

"Of course Lady Beaumont must be there," Harvey cried. "Everybody will be disappointed if she doesn't honour us with her presence. We all want her to see how we admire and esteem the gentleman who is so soon to be her husband. And if her grace——" he went on, turning to the Duchess.

"I am coming, invited or not. There will be a prodigious crowd. All sorts of famous people will be there. Your green-room won't hold us."

The presentation from his friends in the theatre was to take place at the end of the play, after Godwin had said his few farewell words to the audience across the footlights. Harvey wanted the ceremony performed on the stage, in the interval between the tragedy and the after-piece, but neither Godwin nor the actors would consent to this. An act of friendship was not to be turned into a show for the pit and gallery. There was vulgarity in the idea.

The Committee had been in favour of a public dinner, and the usual speech-making; but against this Godwin protested. Let his friends give him his present with only kind, unconsidered words, and he would thank them from his heart.

But first there came the farewell after the green curtain had fallen on the tragedy, and had been raised in a tumult of applause; and once more the slender figure in Hamlet's sable suit stood alone in the midst of that vast stage, as it had stood on that bleak January night, when the actor's long apprenticeship of adversity was paid for in one vivid hour. He was standing there again, speechless in the roar of the multitude, the same graceful figure, the same pale countenance, alight with genius; the same music in the voice that stilled the tumult, and was heard in the remotest corner of the house.

Many words were not needed, for these words were golden—as they came from the heart of a man exquisitely sensitive to every expression of feeling in his audience.

He told them what it cost him to say good-bye, and how deep was the sense of all he owed them in his stage career. What-

ever he had achieved as an actor, he had done by their help. Their sympathy and quick understanding, the knowledge that he could carry them along with him, had made his art easy. And then came the last word, the word that had to be spoken, and the falling curtain hid the face that no stage-lights were ever to shine upon again.

The curtain had gone up for the after-piece, "The Lottery Ticket," before the Duchess and Lady Beaumont left their box, escorted as before by stage-manager Harvey.

"It wasn't grand as a speech," he said, "but he made the women cry."

Mr. Harvey looked as if *he* had been crying. The green-room was a mass of people, but someone had kept seats for the two ladies—one of whom was an object of supreme interest to the Drury Lane company. The actors and actresses were all there, every creature on the salary list, except the few people who were engaged in the after-piece. Some were still in their stage clothes; but Stormont had had plenty of time to change his ghostly armour for a blue frock-coat and a canary waistcoat, in which he flattered himself he might be taken for a Cabinet Minister. Campion, still in his royal robes, was to make the presentation, and had been occupied for the last week in the composition and rehearsal of his speech. It had been a labour of love, he told everybody. It is curious how all animosities and envious feelings had ceased after Godwin's illness, and from the hour it became known that he was never coming back to the theatre. There was no more talk of the rocket and the stick. The rocket might have been a star of the first magnitude, so respectfully did the actors talk of its effulgence.

They had talked of the man who was no longer their rival as we talk of the illustrious dead. They compared him with Garrick, and quarrelled with any critic who disputed his superiority to the older actor. Henceforth he was in nobody's way. He belonged to history. They hoped that he would be happy with his aristocratic wife; but they feared that after a year or two of domestic bliss he might find life insipid without the theatre.

Isabel Beaumont watched the door through which her lover was to come. It seemed a long time, and the noise of many voices hurt her ear. Then at last, in a moment, he was in the midst of the crowd, quietly making his way towards her, in evening dress, very pale and tired-looking, but with eyes full of light.



She gave him her hand, as he bent over her chair, and he held it as if he never meant to let it go.

"The farewell has been spoken, and I am an actor no longer. The stage-player is dead."

"And you are sorry?" she asked piteously.

"Do I look sorry?"

Campion cleared his throat, and Harvey entreated silence. There was a table in front of the empty fireplace—with an object upon it, covered with a square of green baize, and everybody knew that the object was the silver vase, designed by Sir Francis Chantrey, who was there among the crowd.

Campion's speech was long and rhetorical—but he spoke it with the art of an experienced actor, the old stager, who even in those remote days was supposed to be a vanishing quantity. He spoke with vigour, dashing a tear from his eyelids, at certain points—well thought out—and his speech was applauded with enthusiasm.

"We all love him; I am not afraid to say that I love him!" he said, by way of postscript, after his peroration. "Though all the world knows that we have spilt each other's blood, George Godwin, amidst his troops of friends, has not a truer friend than James Campion."

Mr. Campion could not deny himself this allusion to his duel. It was the proudest event of his life.

Now came a great hand-shaking—for everybody had to shake hands with Godwin—scene-shifters—stage-door keepers—carpenters—property-men—sweepers—charwomen—some of them in their Sunday clothes, some who had just come from their work—without time to wash their hands. Godwin grasped all the kind hands—clean or dirty. He thanked Campion for his speech; and every malicious word that had ever been breathed in professional rivalry was forgotten. The actor's jealousy is a wrong that no great actor resents.

Dukes and duchesses waited while the humble workers crowded round the hero of the night—waited and made room for weeping charwomen, who all must murmur their word of gratitude for kind things the actor had done for them—half-sovereigns dropped into grimy palms—less precious than the smile and the word that went with them. It was a moving scene—and the classic vase was forgotten while everyone crowded round the man. Nobody looked at it. There was a distant noise that indicated that the after-piece was finished, and the audience were leaving the theatre; whereupon the visitors dispersed quickly.

Mr. Harvey took charge of the Duchess and Lady Beaumont. He was to see them to their carriage, while Godwin went to his dressing-room, where Renshaw was waiting for him to finish the business of the night. This done, he was to get back to Bedford Square—to join his friends at supper. Fenwick and O'Brien and Mrs. Harvey were to be there, the lady elated at being bidden to the famous house for the first time, and at the prospect of hobnobbing with a duchess.

Sarah Merritt had not been at the theatre. In view of this little supper-party she had preferred to stay quietly at home.

"You'll tell me all about it, won't you, my dear?" she said to Isabel, when they were leaving her. "We shall talk of this night often and often in days to come. And I'm afraid if I was in the theatre I might make a fool of myself, and upset others."

She was at home waiting for them all. The hours had been long—very long—but there was the rapture of his return to look forward to.

She walked about the house—looking fondly at the rooms, dimly lit by the candle she was carrying—an abode of shadow.

"This is *my* farewell," she thought, "a long farewell to this dear house, where I have been so happy with the best son that ever cared for a foolish old mother."

A faint shiver came over her as she looked into Godwin's bedroom, recalling that ghastly story of the suicide who had lain there in his grave-clothes; and then she hurried downstairs, glad to be nearer the maids whose strong voices could be heard from the basement.

She looked for the last time at the supper-table—beautified with roses—a cold supper, that could be made to please the eye, as well as the palate. What pains she and her cook had taken with those *pièces montées*—and how she hoped that having dined at five her guests might be in good appetite after midnight.

What a long night it was, and how sad and strange the silence of the house. She thought of the many nights—almost as long—when she had waited in the silence—without this feeling of depression, this vague fear of changes that might bring sorrow. She was a cheerful woman, not given to morbid imaginings—but to-night she was full of fear, for it seemed to her that her happy life with her son was coming to an end. Fanny had not parted them; but that was because he had never loved Fanny as he loved this peerless lady, with a passion that must absorb

all his capacity for feeling, and make any other affection impossible. In three days he would be married, and on his way to Scotland, and he was to spend the close of the year in Italy. It would be long before she would look upon his face after that marriage-day.

He had done everything to make her happy. He had provided her pretty home and her garden, and a phaeton with a sturdy cob which she was to drive as she had driven Peggy. Her life at Mount Pleasant was to be the life of a prosperous woman; but what would it be worth without him? Now, on the threshold of this parting, she knew all he had been to her. She looked back at the days in the van, the joyous life under green boughs.

"Those were my happy days," she thought.

Never had she been quite so happy as in those days of hard work and scanty fare, when her boy was not too big to sit upon her lap with his arms round her neck, while she told him stories of the theatre.

Her spirits revived when the company arrived, and when Lady Beaumont gave her a full account of the scene in the green-room—Campion's glowing words—the affection shown by every actor and every servant of the theatre.

"Can you wonder if I love him—when he is so beloved?" Isabel asked in conclusion, and then with Sarah's comfortable hand in hers, she said gently: "Don't think that I am going to rob you of his affection, dear soul. His heart is large enough for both of us—mother and wife. You mustn't be parted from him long. You are to come to Glenroy in September, and then you will know how sweet a Scottish autumn can be."

Sarah could not answer. A weight was lifted from her heart. The kind words gave her new life.

They were in the drawing-room—bright with many wax candles, as for a festival.

Everybody was in gala dress, the Duchess with a diamond necklace to relieve the severity of her black velvet gown, Mrs. Harvey in a crimson tabinet that echoed her florid complexion, Lady Beaumont in pale grey satin—so pale as to be silvery white in the candle-light. She had put on her most sumptuous gown to do honour to her lover's farewell.

She and Sarah had been sitting side by side on a sofa in the back drawing-room—forgetful of the rest of the company, till the Duchess came to them.

"It's nearly one o'clock," she said. "Ought he not to be here by this time?"

"Oh, I suppose they all wanted to say last words to him," Sarah answered. "It would be very difficult for him to get away from them."

The Duchess remembered the supper-parties in that house, and how Godwin had appeared among them suddenly, like a ghost, surprising everybody by his rapid change from stage clothes to evening dress. And to-night he had no change to make, and they had been sitting there for half an hour.

Sarah had spoken quite easily—but a cloud of fear had come upon them all by this time. Fenwick was moving about restlessly. He had opened the shutters of one long window, and peered out into the night. The rain was beating against the glass, and the sky was black as ink.

"Sure, I'll run to the theatre and see if I can't bring the rascal back with me," O'Brien said gaily.

"What, through that downpour?" cried Fenwick.

"Do ye think that a South of Ireland man is afraid of a thrifle of rain? Maybe he's waiting for a hackney-coach—and I may pick up one on the way."

He ran downstairs, but he was scarcely out of the room when there came a loud ringing of the door-bell—a ringing that startled them all, and everyone hurried to the landing.

"There you are at last, you villain," cried O'Brien, while the maid was opening the door. "D'ye think it was manners to keep us all waiting for our supper?"

There was no gay response to the jovial appeal—only dead silence; and the man who came in at the open door was not Godwin, but Renshaw—Renshaw with a face of death.

They had all come downstairs, but Lady Beaumont was first to reach the hall. She was hurrying towards Renshaw when Fenwick pushed in front of her with a movement which the Duchess was quick to understand.

"What is the matter?" Fenwick asked in a whisper—and then impatiently, as Renshaw tried to speak—"Is he ill?"

"He is dying—Lady Beaumont is to go to him. Can you bring her?—and his mother? There's a coach at the door. Not a moment to lose—get them to the stage door."

"Is it a seizure?"

"No," and then in a dreadful whisper, "Murder."

No other word was spoken. The two women were helped into the coach, distracted, trembling convulsively, with limbs

that felt like water. Neither could question the valet. They had lost all power of speech. Isabel had heard that one word "dying," but not the ghastly word that followed.

The driver sent his horses along at a gallop. The streets were empty, with no sound but the splashing of the rain.

He was lying on a mattress in the vestibule inside the stage door—the place where he had waited, eating his heart, in days that he had never forgotten. There were two doctors, one kneeling by his side, one looking down with a countenance that forbade hope. The stage-door keeper was there, and Harvey. No one else.

Fenwick whispered a question to one of the doctors.

"Stabbed in the back with a long, thin dagger. It has touched the heart."

"Is he conscious?"

"For a moment, now and then."

There was a pillow under his head, and he was looking up at the ceiling, with glazing eyes. Isabel flung herself on the ground by his side and laid her cheek against his.

"Kiss me, dear," he whispered. "I believe in God. He will not part us for ever."

No more. The murderer had done his work well. The long, thin dagger—a Roman dagger, as old as the Borgias, had reached that generous heart.

Fenwick heard the stage-door keeper's story later, when the swooning women had been carried away.

"The coach was waiting at the end of the court," the man said. "Renshaw went out first, carrying the dog, to keep him out of the rain. You know what a fuss he always made of his dog. Mr. Godwin stopped at the door to speak to me. 'Good night,' he says. 'You know this time it means good-bye,' he says, and he gave me a sovereign. He stood for a minute looking at the rain, and I stood with him. It was raining heavens hard, and there was not a living soul to be seen in the court—from one end to the other. He went out quickly, and I shut the door—but I had hardly drawn the first bolt, when I heard a groan, and somebody trying the handle of the door. I opened it quickly, and he fell into my arms—speechless—and my hands that were holding him were covered with blood. I called for help, and my wife came from our bedroom close by, and brought our mattress for him to lie upon, and then Mr. Harvey. The carpenters and everybody had gone home—but there were



plenty of people about presently—God knows where they came from, one of 'em had met a man at the other end of the court, not the end where the coach was waiting, running for his life—a young man, he thought, that slipped by him, and disappeared in the darkness."

That was all the doorkeeper knew. Harvey had rushed about—had summoned doctors—had raised the hue and cry—but the murderer had not been found.

"He must have been hiding in one of them deep doorways, when I looked up and down the court," the doorkeeper said.

He was the chief witness at the inquest, and what he had to tell was all that the public who loved George Godwin ever knew about his death.

But there was one piece of silent evidence that helped to break Isabel Beaumont's heart.

On a slip of paper twisted round the hilt of the dagger there were these words—in a hand she knew too well:—

"Atheist—hypocrite—blasphemer."

The report of Godwin's death fell like a cloud over London. A famous actor occupies a large place in the public mind, and Godwin had been as popular in the great world as he had been in the theatre. That he whose life had been so generous and so sweet should have come to an end so ghastly was a horror to all who had ever known him as an actor or as a friend.

Relentless search was made for the murderer; with the usual experience of false scents and delusive clues. Certainties were arrived at where there was nothing sure. The man was an Italian. The blow had been struck with the force and precision of an experienced hand. The blow was in the Italian manner, just as certainly as that the dagger was of Roman workmanship—three hundred years old.

The criminal who was hunted was an Italian—an exile—a conspirator—a member of the terrible Carbonari, a wretch with whom murder would be only an incident in the pursuit of his revenge. How Godwin could have provoked the mortal hatred of such a man was an insoluble mystery; but that such a man had killed him was sufficiently proved to the understanding of most people by the evidence of the dagger and the manner of the blow; but no trace of such a man—or only illusive traces—being found, as time rolled on, the murder of George Godwin took its place in the catalogue of undiscovered crimes.

In all the world there were only three people who could have named the murderer. One was the Superior of the Benedictine Monastery on the Aventine; one was a young Italian doctor who had failed in his trust; and the third was a woman for whom the year that followed Godwin's death was a time of darkness—a space in which there was neither time nor change, night nor day.

## EPILOGUE

YEARS have passed since Godwin's death, and two white-haired women walk on the moss-grown terrace at Glenroy, one still young, the other old. Grief has done swiftly for the first what time has done slowly for the second. They are fast friends, these two, though in birth, breeding, and education far as the poles asunder. They love each other for the love of one whom they both loved—"this side of idolatry." In Isabel's day of desolation Sarah Merritt was her only friend, the only creature—except mute servants—whom she could bear to have about her.

They are fast friends now—living quietly in the old Scottish manor, occupied with good works, beloved by all their humble neighbours ; but keeping themselves apart from the great people about them.

Isabel Beaumont's mourning knows no alteration as the years go by. She does not plague other people with her grief. Her black gown is the only outward sign. She is kind to nephews and nieces ; but her kindness is expressed in lavish gifts, rather than in hospitality. The young, happy voices would jar upon the silence of the fifteenth-century manor-house. Those massive stone walls, with all their grim traditions, were not meant to shelter youth and budding hopes.

Sometimes in the gloaming, before curtains are drawn and lamps lighted in the spacious library that was to have been Godwin's sitting-room, the two women sit on each side of the hearth, and talk of him. The time has come when they can bear to talk about their dead—when there is sweetness and consolation for Isabel in hearing Sarah's stories of the boy's childhood and youth—the long years of struggle and the day of success. She hears the same things over and over again, and never tires. His goodness, his kindness to man and beast—his courage that never failed, his self-denial—or, to sum up his mother's praises—his superiority to every other creature upon earth. Isabel never tires, never thinks the homely speech dull, or the homely face ugly ; but listens with a sad, sweet

smile, stooping now and then to caress the Scotch terrier that lies on her silken skirt, and is her companion by day and night—a very old dog now, and rheumatic, but tenderly nursed and doctored, and dearly loved.

Years have gone since Godwin's death before Isabel knows the fate of his murderer. And then at last there comes a letter from the Superior of a Carthusian monastery, with a message from a dying man, a lay-brother, who came to them one autumn night, a pilgrim, ragged and footsore, gaunt and worn with long travel, they knew not whence, and almost dying. He had lived and toiled for seven years in the monastery, had borne all the rigour of their order with exemplary patience, and though not right in his mind, and of a hopeless melancholy, had never failed at his humble tasks, or his religious exercises.

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# Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s ANNOUNCEMENTS For the Autumn of 1911

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## Westminster Cathedral and Its Architect

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